

# A Content Analysis on the Representation of Cultural Themes in German Textbooks

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**Abstract – Teachers rely heavily upon text books as the main instructional resource to teach German as a Foreign Language (GFL) throughout India. Communicative textbooks are developed based on the communicative language teaching approach and implement the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels. Such books include lists of communicative functions, grammar forms and language skills to be practiced by the learner simulating real-life situations in the target country. Learning a language is not only learning the alphabets, grammar or functions; it's also about learning the society, its customs and the other auxiliary communication techniques. However, it is seen that little attention has been given in textbooks in incorporating sufficient cultural content and there is an imbalance in the way both surface and deep culture are dealt in textbooks. This study therefore investigates the representation of surface and deep culture in an A1 level German textbook "NETZWERK". Analyzing the cultural content represented in the textbook reveals that there is a discernible gap in the way surface and deep cultures are dealt with in the textbook. Nevertheless the additional tools incorporated in the course book if used effectively in the GFL classroom would enhance the learning of deep culture and fortify the intercultural competency of the learners.**

**Keywords: Content Analysis, Communicative Text Books, German Language Teaching, Intercultural Competency, Surface/Deep Culture**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Text books are one of the main instructional resources heavily relied upon and used by the teachers to teach German as a Foreign Language (GFL) throughout India. GFL textbooks used in Indian classrooms have been predominantly written by German authors and have reflected the methodology of teaching that was in vogue in each period of the methods era. Books like "Deutsche Sprachlehre für Ausländer" were based primarily on grammar forms and advocated direct method. Ever since the advent of the communicative language teaching and the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels in teaching, learning and assessment, books prescribed for learning German have been following them. Some of the GFL text books mostly used in Indian classrooms are "Lagune", "Studio D", "Netzwerk" etc. Such communicative textbooks so developed include lists of communicative functions, grammar forms and language skills to be practiced by the learner and they display communicative tasks simulating real-life situations in the target country. Learning a language is not only learning the alphabets, grammar or functions; it's also about learning the society, its customs and the other auxiliary communication techniques [1]. The need

and the rationale for learning a foreign language in this globalized world go beyond language structures and grammatical forms. The principle objective of foreign language teaching-learning has now evolved to building global citizenship or as Kumaravadivelu called fostering "Global Cultural Consciousness" among learners [2]. With English being the Lingua Franca of the business world, in the rapidly transforming business domain, what is more sought after in an employee is his/her understanding of the culture of the people they work than the proficiency to fluently communicate in any particular foreign language. The Intercultural competency, i.e. "the ability to effectively and appropriately interact in an intercultural situation or context" [3] be it within the working team or with the global team has to be nurtured along with language teaching. As Byram pointed out "the success of interaction implies not only on effective interchange of information, as was the goal of communicative language teaching, but also the ability to decenter and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior" [4]. This puts intercultural competency in the center of foreign language teaching but there is also this question of which culture to teach?

Culture is dynamic. It is transformational. Language and culture are interrelated and have a complex and homologous relationship between them. They both communicate through each other and the sociocultural aspects of communication and the cultural contents intercede within the language use. As illustrated in Hall's Iceberg model of culture [5], there are two parts – the visible part called the surface culture (Oberfläschen kultur) and the invisible part called the deep culture (Tiefenkultur).

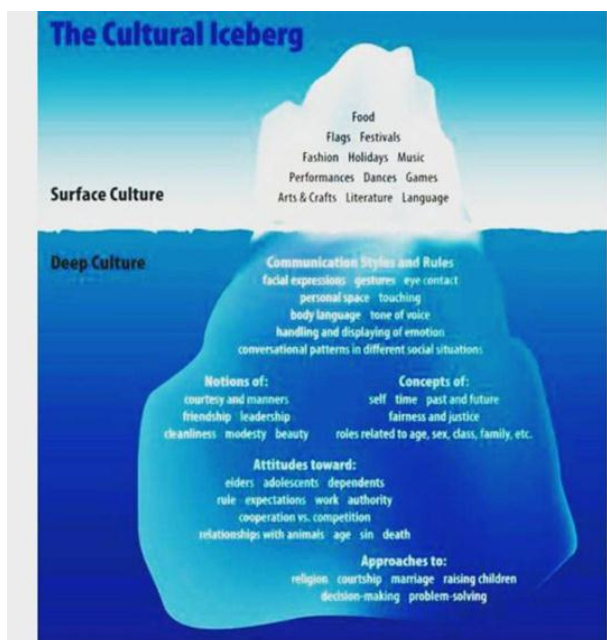


Fig 1: Hall's Iceberg model of Culture

The surface culture is also called the 'High Culture' or the Big C culture and is understood as the product of any country, namely, its language, literature, music, festivals, clothing, architecture etc. This is the traditional 'Landeskunde' approach to culture and it largely consisted of the declarative knowledge, the facts and figures about the target country.

The deep culture also known as the little c culture goes deeper in to the psychological aspects of the target culture and represents the peoples' attitudes, customs, beliefs, conventions, communication styles and rules etc. This is implicit and invisible and hence becomes difficult to study too.

Considering the fact that textbooks play a pivotal role in language dissemination, it would only be desirable if the cultural components are integrated within the textbooks itself. So in the text books that are mostly used in Indian GFL classrooms, which type of culture is represented? Do the textbooks incorporate sufficient contents representing both the cultures? This study is hence undertaken to analyze the representation of surface and deep culture in a GFL textbook.

## 2. STUDIES ON CULTURAL CONTENT IN TEXT BOOKS

A textbook can be analyzed either for its didactics or for its content. The former analyzes the pedagogy implied by the text while the latter analyzes the content of the text itself. Many studies have been undertaken in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context – both didactic as well as content analyses [1, 6, 7].

Angela Leahy in her doctoral dissertation studied the language texts in three German grammar books and exercise books. She explored how the concordances relating to "work" are grouped and examined it in terms of 'what they reveal about professions, workplace hierarchy, attitudes and approaches to work' [8].

Mareike Müller reviewed two GFL textbooks and analyzed how pronunciation exercises are designed in these textbooks to enhance L1 listening and articulation patterns. She found a perceptible gap between the potential for providing a creative pronunciation exercise and the actual representation in the textbook. She suggested that textbooks integrate pronunciation training with other areas such as grammar or vocabulary to augment oral training.

The current study proposed here draws parallel with the previous studies found in the literature and undertakes to examine the cultural content represented in an A1 level GFL textbook.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to understand how culture is represented in GFL textbooks. It analyzed the cultural content represented in an A1 level GFL textbook called "NETZWERK". The book has 12 lessons and the cultural content in each of the lesson was thoroughly evaluated and differentiated in to "Hochkultur"(High Culture) or "Tiefenkultur" (Deep Culture) based on the above stated definitions of these terms. The findings of the study and what it implies to the teachers of the language are as detailed below.

## 4. FINDINGS

Based on Hall's Iceberg model of culture and the definitions and understanding of what constitutes as "Hochkultur" and "Tiefenkultur" the cultural content in each of the twelve lessons [9] were studied and the findings are tabulated in TABLE 1 below.

**Table 1: Representation of surface and deep culture in an A1 level German textbook “NETZWERK”**

Themen	Hochkultur	Tiefenkultur
Lektion 1 Guten Tag	Geographical facts: Different countries and languages spoken	Notions of courtesy and manners (Grüßen / Duzen / Siezen) Gestures and body language
Lektion 2 Freunde, Kollegen und ich	Jahreszeiten verschiedene Hobbys	keine
Lektion 3 In der Stadt	Sehenswürdigkeiten / Zahlen und Events in Hamburg tourist places/geographical sites/events/directions	keine
Lektion 4 Guten Appetit	Essen in D-A-CH Berufe rund ums Essen typical food & professions	keine
Lektion 5 Tag für Tag	Pünktlichkeiten in D-A-CH Day-to-day activities	Time related notions and attitudes
Lektion 6 Zeit mit Freunden	Geographical facts: verschiedene Lokale	keine
Lektion 7 Kontakte	Soziale Netzwerke in D-A-CH	keine
Lektion 8 Meine Wohnung	Wohnformen in D-A-CH	keine
Lektion 9 Alles Arbeit	Saisonjobs in D-A-CH	keine
Lektion 10 Kleidung und Mode	Trendstadt in Berlin	keine
Lektion 11 Gesund und munter	Hausmittel gegen Krankheiten	keine
Lektion 12 Ab in den Urlaub	Beliebte Reiseziele in Deutschland	keine

## 5. DISCUSSION

From the findings detailed in Table 1 above it is evident that only surface culture (Hochkultur) is predominantly represented and there is a mention of only two deep culture (Tiefenkultur) themes. The target culture is given prime importance and although Germany and its related facts and figures are emphasized, there are also representative topics from the D-A-CH (Germany/Austria and Switzerland) regions where German is widely spoken. The static aspects like tourist spots, food, buildings, events/festivals which constitute the surface culture are the themes widely discussed. The notions of courtesy, manner and body languages used by people while greeting one another along with the notions and attitude to time are the few deep culture concepts elucidated in the textbook. Ten out of twelve lessons in this textbook present only the neutral and homogeneous topics of surface culture with an aim to familiarize the learners about the German speaking countries. For example in lesson six, the different types of 'Lokale' where friends meet up to spend time is detailed through short texts and listening activities. The favourite travel destinations of Germans are also described in lesson twelve. The idea being representing the target culture and international target culture, these themes are represented well in the lessons but heterogeneous and complex themes related to the deep culture are minimal. The text is limited in promoting intercultural competency. There are no activities for comparing the source culture with the target culture or expressing the source culture in the target language. As Vernier et al. [10] illustrated it culture is the fifth skill that has to be taught to the learners of foreign languages "to enhance students' overall learning experiences". But if the surface culture is what is predominantly highlighted in the textbooks, will this be sufficient to prepare learners to interact in a globalized world characterized by interculturality? The topics dealt are rich with general information required to survive in the German speaking countries but this survival guidance alone might not be adequate to understand the profound meaning and content of intercultural competency.

With the textbooks approach being static and congratulatory, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers of GFL to incorporate the transformative and challenging views of the deep culture in the classrooms. With authentic materials like newspapers or audio visuals, teachers have to bring in topics related to power, ideologies, beliefs and notions and discuss such sensitive topics comparing them with the learners' own culture drawing parallel on the similarities and the differences. Equal opportunities and 'Redewendungen' (useful phrases) to express their own culture through German should also be created in the classroom by the teachers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Language learning is borderless and travels beyond boundaries; it is culture-bound. Text books are loaded with linguistic knowledge and they have minimal elements of deep culture which might not be adequate in developing the intercultural competency of the learners of GFL. As found through this study, though there is a discernible gap in the way surface and deep cultures are dealt with in the textbook, the additional tools incorporated in the course book if used effectively in the GFL classroom would enhance the learning of deep culture and fortify the intercultural competency of the learners. A good balance of both surface and deep culture by the teachers is the need of the hour is building intercultural competency among learners in this globalized era.

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