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Research Article

# Cultural Aspects in French Coursebooks DEFI A1 and DEFI A2

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**ABSTRACT** In foreign language teaching, socio-linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence and intercultural competence is one of the most important skills that learners are supposed to acquire. Defi coursebook is designed for learners who learn French as a foreign language. In this study, inclusion of cultural elements in French coursebooks Defi A1 and A2 has been analyzed in four cultural aspect categories which are "product, person, practise and perspective". In the study, descriptive content analysis method has been used. The units have been evaluated in terms of cultural content and theme, then those themes are categorized according to those four subcategories. The number of themes under each category have been cross-sectionally compared. Most common cultural theme in A1 level is found to be product, practise, perspective and person from the highest to the lowest respectively. As for A2 level distribution of subcategories "person" was found to be highest then product. Perspective and practise at this level was found to be equally distributed and less than person and product.

**KEYWORDS:** Sociolinguistic competence, Foreign language teaching, French as a foreign language, Cultural aspects

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# INTRODUCTION

Culture and language are intertwined and their relationship is multidirectional. They influence each other in many ways. Language is an important part of culture and culture cannot exist without language. Language cannot be thought of without the culture. Culture incl udes the beliefs, values and norms of a society which are transmitted with language. Language reflects culture, culture reflects language. In foreign language learning, usually, native language and culture affect the way target language and culture learning. In governing the target language, learners may encounter unfamiliarity with the culture-specific parts of the language. It is inevitable for the learners to view the target culture and language from a native language perspective. Learners can get the lexical and grammatical features of language in a shorter period of time in comparison to the acqusition of the features of target culture. Culture familiairty improves with reading a lot in the target language and having real life experience in the country. Usually foreign language learners may not have the chance to experience the real life experience in the native country.

Cultural elements in coursebooks can also be categorized according to source culture, target culture and international culture (Kaewsakul & Teo, 2016). French learners need to be equipped with an ability to use French as a foreign language, together with cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic and intercultural competence.

## Sociocultural and Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence is defined as "the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language" in Common European Framework of Reference (2020). Sociocultural competence and sociolinguistic competence is closely related with each other and intertwined. The competence includes using the language appropriately, using the correct conventions and being aware of different language registers, understanding cultural and social implications, recognizing cultural nuances and adopting appropriate registers in appropriate contexts.

Intercultural communication plays an important role in language learning. Intercultural awareness can be increased with appropriate teaching techniques and materials in the foreign language classrooms. More than transfer of the culture, intercultural communication and sociolinguistic competence is emphasized in contemporary foreign language classrooms. Communicative competence includes the competence about the cultural and sociolinguistic features of the language. Communicative competence is an important skill which takes much more time and effort than it is for grammatical competence. The acquisition of communicative competence and sociolinguistic competence in the native language is a natural process of socialization and language learning, they are usually subconsciously acquired not taught by someone. However, it is not the same process for foreign language learners. If they are not young learners, they need to be exposed to direct and conscious learning process (Sun, 2013).

## Culture Aspects in Coursebooks

Cunningsworth states that coursebooks play an important role for foreign language teaching and they are primary sources of cultural representations if the language is taught in another country. At each level culture signs are reflected with different contexts. All shareholders of language learning process, language teachers, course developers, scholars, users, education planners arrange the elements to be included in the coursebooks (Cunningsworth, 1995).

Foreign language coursebooks as teaching materials represent culture and social identities in different ways via visuals, videos and texts to enable the learners gain an understanding about inter and cross cultural aspects of the languages. Culturally various content should be integrated into coursebooks to increase awareness and show culturally appropriate conducts. As intercultural communication, cross-cultural and sociolinguistic competence are important 21st century language skills, coursebooks are supposed to be designed accordingly (Saemee & Nomnian, 2021).

Teaching materials play a very important role for students language learning process and personal development. With the advances in technology, textbooks can be distributed in different formats and they continue to be an integral part of language teaching procedure (Baskın, 2018). Coursebooks also provide appropriate language for cultural transfer and also help breaking all prejudices about cultures and languages. The effectiveness of the coursebooks depends on the teachers' experience, background knowledge and training. In Common European Framework Reference socio-cultural and socio-linguistic competence of foreign language learners are emphasized. It is highlighted that "*students should have knowledge about different countries and cultures, should compare target language cultures with their own cultures, and should have conversation with the target language speakers*" (CEFR, 2020). The following categories are about culture signs supposed to take place in coursebooks: Daily life, life conditions, interpersonal

communication, values, beliefs and behaviours, body language, social traditions, arts, architecture, food, touristic places, ceremonies, festivals etc (Baskın, 2018).

As Arslan (2020) states to understand intercultural skills we need to take Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Model. This model has five key categories which are knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness and attitudes. Knowledge emphasizes knowledge about social products, institutions and culture-specific practices. Skills of interpreting and relating are concerned with establishing a relationship between the source culture and target culture and making interpretations accordingly. Skills of discovery and interaction are gained through communication with the target culture in a variety of contexts. Cultural awareness is related to individuals' evaluations of cultural implementations. As for the attitudes, it is about avoiding stereotyping, developing empathy and tolerance about the differences and being open-minded about different implementations (Byram, 1997).

Textbooks are designed with a multifaceted perspective. When designing textbooks, both the target language and culture characteristics and the source culture and implementations are taken into consideration. User profiles are highly important for the effectiveness of the coursebooks, learners' language proficiency, age, interests and aim of learning, and cultural sensitivities. Together with the cultural content linguistic forms, functions, and vocabulary are introduced. However, culture is not directly introduced in the textbooks, instead, it is given implicitly or in a very superficial way. Usually, culture is introduced in the textbooks from touristic perspective like customs, food, clothes, people and buildings. This content is not sufficient for raising cultural awareness for language learners. Many studies have shown that textbooks fail to integrate cultural elements in language teaching in an effective way. Textbooks usually give priority to only target culture and ignore other cultures. Materials are supposed to include target culture, source culture and intercultural elements. Various content of cultural elements from different cultures should be included. Stereotyping and prejudiced cultural components need to be avoided and learners should be aware of values, beliefs, norms and other elements of different cultures to gain intercultural communicative competence.

In this study, French as a foreign language coursebooks Defi A1 and Defi A2 will be evaluated in terms of cultural reflections and signs according to those four categories. This study aims to find a response to the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution of cultural signs in French Coursebook Defi A1?
2. What is the distribution of cultural signs in French Coursebook Defi A2?
3. What aspects of culture are more emphasized in A1 in comparison to A2 and vice versa?

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive content analysis method has been used. In content analysis the aim is to organize data according to a previously defined certain framework of concepts and themes by evaluating and interpreting them in a comprehensive way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

In the current study, Yuen's (2011) categories of cultural aspects have been analyzed in French coursebooks at A1 and A2 levels. French coursebooks Defi A1 and Defi A2 have been analyzed according to the elaborated cultural aspects. Those categories are named as four "Ps" which are *products, persons, practices and perspectives*. The definitions of those categories are as follows: product includes concrete objects, places, food, movie, song etc, person includes everything related to people of the country and contemporary and historically popular figures, practise refers to rituals, ceremonies, festivals, traditions, social activities and cultural practises and final category perspective includes the way people perceive something in comparison to other cultures, attitudes, notions, myths, beliefs, values etc. Each book level has been shown in tables and the number of cultural items used has been counted. The levels have been cross-sectionally compared and the obtained results have been discussed. In this study, ethical permission is not needed as it is a descriptive content analysis study.

## FINDINGS

As it can be seen in Table 1, introduction about France and its important places have been emphasized. *Person* and *perspective* aspect of culture at A1 level is emphasized less than other aspects. In Unit 2 *person*, in Unit 3 *perspective*, in Unit 4 *person*, in Unit 5 and 6 *product, person* and *perspective*, in Unit 7 *person* and *perspective* aspects have not been elaborated at all. The most frequently elaborated cultural aspect at this level is found to be *product* aspect.

In Table 2, cultural aspects in A2 level are widely about *person* and *products* which is supposed to be an appropriate context for CEFR (2020). At this level, all aspects of culture have been elaborated except for *person* aspect in Unit 3. In this book, the most frequently elaborated subcategory is found to be *perspective.*

**Table 1: A1 level Cultural Aspects**

| UNITE 1 | Dossier 1 et 2 | UNITE 2 | Dossier 1 et 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Product: alphabet de Paris, l'euro, un wagon de métro, le plan du métro de Paris, les arrondissements de Paris et les lieux célèbres de chaque arrondissement, L'arc de Triomphe, Une bouche de métro, le canal Saint-Martin, la Défense, la Gare du Nord, les Halles, un Kiosque, le Jardin de Luxembourg, Montmartre, Notre-Dame, l'Opéra Garnier, le Panthéon, les quais de Seine, la rue de Rivoli, le Sacré-Cœur, la Tour Eiffel, l'Université Sorbonne, Versailles, l'école X (école polytechnique), le zoo de Vincennes<br>Person: les métiers féminins et masculins en France<br>Practise: les gestes pour dire les numéros en France, la France et les Français, voisins, 2 chaines de haute montagne, population, nombre d'habitants, la monnaie, le nombre de langue, la vidéo dressant le portrait d'une femme dans un métier d'homme, la pyramide des âges des Français<br>Perspective: la différence des lettres entre le français et les autres langues, Les caractéristiques des pays. | | Product: la géographie, société, art et culture et la gastronomie en Belgique, voyager, souvenirs de voyage<br>Person : -<br>Practise: la zinneke parade en Belgique, la culture au Maroc<br>Perspective: Une Belgique multiculturelle dans une Europe multiculturelle, les stéréotypes au Canada, à Tahiti, au Sénégal, au Vietnam |
| **UNITE 3** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 4** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: Une famille française, la série Parents mode d'emploi,<br>Person: Nicolas Sarkozy, Carla Bruni, François Hollande, Ségolène Royale.<br>Practise: vidéo pour un diner en famille : Rapsodie pour un pot-au-feu, les types de famille en France, les types d'unions en France, les mariages mixtes en Europe.<br>Perspective: - | | Product: le logement<br>Person: -<br>Practise: vidéo pour la chambre de bonne à Paris, les règles du Feng Shui.<br>Perspective: le prix des loyers dans cinq villes francophones, les petites-annonces en France, la maison-type bruxelloise |
| **UNITE 5** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 6** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: -<br>Person: -<br>Practise: les rythmes de vie, le temps de travail et rythmes de vie au Québec et en France / le temps de travail en Belgique, en France et en Suisse, les rythmes scolaires en France et en île Maurice, vidéo pour ou contre le travail du dimanche.<br>Perspective: - | | Product: -<br>Person: -<br>Practise: Un week-end à Essaouira (le Maroc), les loisirs des Français, les réseaux sociaux en France, les lieux de vacances francophones.<br>Perspective: - |
| **UNITE 7** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 8** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: les moyens de transport à Paris, Abidjan et la Cote d'Ivoire,<br>Person: -<br>Practise: Visite à Nancy, les applications mobiles utilisées par le Français, les made in France : (AroundMe, Kidil) et le commerce de proximité<br>Perspective: - | | Product: l'histoire de quatre aliments, la cuisine du monde<br>Person: Thierry Marx, chef.<br>Practise: le gaspillage alimentaire en France<br>Perspective: la semaine du goût |

**Table 2: A2 level Cultural Aspects**

| UNITE 1 | Dossier 1 et 2 | UNITE 2 | Dossier 1 et 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Product: nos futurs objets du quotidien<br>Person: David Pujadas (qu'est ce que les deux familles louent et achetent?), Jean Tinguely, Annette Messager, Romuald Hazoumé.<br>Practise: le commerce en France<br>Perspective: RCR (Le réseau de consommateurs responsables, une association belge ) | | Product: SIVA, votre centre bien-être à Bangalore, ayurveda (une médecine traditionnelle indienne très ancienne )<br>Person: Dr. Kesetebirhan Admasu, ministre de la santé d'Éthiopie.<br>Practise: Semaine africaine de la vaccination, le boom des médecines alternatives en France, la musicothérapie<br>Perspective: l'OMS (organisation mondiale de la santé), le boom des médecines alternatives en France |
| **UNITE 3** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 4** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: La crevette dorée, restaurant au Caméroun, Le cordon bleu, le marché de Rungis<br>Person:-<br>Practise: La gastronomie des Outre-Mer, les Français à table,<br>Perspective: La gastronomie des Outre-Mer, les nouvelles tendances en Cuisine pour la France | | Product: le yoga, la randonnée aquatique ou aquamarche, le handball, la marche nordique, le parapente<br>Person: Pierre Coubertin, Docteure Glycine (femme médecin généraliste), Amele, Badara et Boris, Bruno, Ambassadrices de l'Unicef : Nafissatou Thiam, Elisabeth May, Nawal El Moutawakel, Justine Henin.<br>Practise: Les 10 sports les plus pratiqués dans le monde et en France, les jeux olympiques et paralympiques d'été (Paris 2024)<br>Perspective: Les Français font du sport, Les Français ne font pas de sport par manque. Les valeurs du sport avec l'Unesco. L'équipe de sport black-blanc-beur en France |
| **UNITE 5** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 6** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: Le MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)<br>Person: Sylvain Tesson<br>Practise: Le Bac en France, l'alternance en Suisse<br>Perspective: Le système éducatif français, Nouvelles d'Afrique | | Product: Un potager dans l'entreprise,<br>Person: Roxanne Varza, Xiavier Niel<br>Practise: un piano au bureau (l'entreprise Gfi Informatique organise un concert dans ses principales agences en participant à la fête de la musique), le télétravail, la station F<br>Perspective: Être heureux au travail, un animal au travail – l'entreprise Nestlé· Burn-out -bore-out-brown out, les anglicismes sont les nouvelles formes de souffrance au travail, La Francophonie |
| **UNITE 7** | **Dossier 1 et 2** | **UNITE 8** | **Dossier 1 et 2** |
| | Product: Les nouveaux monuments, de l'art à Paris pour 0 euro, *les Rivières pourpres* (le nom du livre de Jean-Christophe Grangé), *A hora da Estrela* de Clarice Lispector.<br>Person: Kim Thùy, Jean-Marc Ligny, Fatou Diome, Régis Jauffret, Amélie Nothomb, Virgine Despentes, Michel Onfray.<br>Practise: livres en fête au Québec<br>Perspective: Et si on n'aime pas lire ? - | | Product: Le guide du routard, le guide Michelin, le blog de Jade<br>Person: Marcel Proust, Hippolyte Taine,<br>Practise: Pourquoi voyage-t-on?, Quelles sont vos vacances idéales?, Faire la coutume dans la culture Kanake, Evaneos (un concept de voyage)<br>Perspective: La culture Kanake en Nouvelle-Calédonie. |

**Table 3: Distribution of Cultural Elements According to Levels**

| | UNIT1 | UNIT 2 | UNIT 3 | UNIT 4 | UNIT 5 | UNIT 6 | UNIT 7 | UNIT 8 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DEFI A1 | Prod.:25<br>Pers:1<br>Prac:10<br>Persp:2<br><br>Total: 38 | Prod:5<br>Pers:-<br>Pract:2<br>Persp:5<br><br>Total: 12 | Prod:2<br>Pers:4<br>Prac:4<br>Persp:-<br><br>Total: 10 | Prod:1<br>Pers:2<br>Prac:-<br>Persp:3<br><br>Total:6 | Prod:-<br>Pers:-<br>Prac:5<br>Persp:-<br><br>Total:5 | Prod:-<br>Pers:-<br>Prac:4<br>Persp:-<br><br>Total: 4 | Prod:2<br>Pers:-<br>Prac:4<br>Persp:-<br><br>Total: 6 | Prod:2<br>Pers:2<br>Prac:1<br>Persp:1<br><br>Total: 6 | Prod:37<br>Pers:9<br>Prac:30<br>Persp:11<br><br>Total:87 |
| DEFI A2 | Prod:1<br>Pers:4<br>Prac:1<br>Pers:1<br><br>Total: 7 | Prod:3<br>Pers:2<br>Prac:3<br>Persp:2<br><br>Total: 10 | Prod:4<br>Pers:-<br>Prac: 2<br>Persp: 2<br><br>Total: 8 | Prod:5<br>Pers:9<br>Prac:2<br>Persp:4<br><br>Total: 20 | Prod:1<br>Pers:1<br>Prac:2<br>Persp:2<br><br>Total:6 | Prod:1<br>Pers: 2<br>Prac:3<br>Persp: 5<br><br>Total: 11 | Prod:4<br>Pers: 7<br>Prac: 1<br>Persp: 1<br><br>Total: 13 | Prod: 3<br>Pers: 3<br>Prac: 4<br>Persp: 1<br><br>Total: 11 | Prod:22<br>Pers:28<br>Prac:18<br>Persp:18<br><br>Total:86 |

In A1 level buildings and practises are emphasized more than other elements. At both levels the least emphasized category is *perspective*. Perspective is a very abstract subtopic which may be difficult to handle at lower levels. *Product* and *practice* have the highest distribution which is expected at lower levels. Practice is lower at the A2 level than it is at the A1 level. Similarly, person-related subjects are covered more at the A2 level. Depending on the targeted content at each level, the distribution of categories shows differences. The total number of cultural items in unit 1 at the A1 level is remarkably higher than the rest of the units. As *product* includes every concrete item like buildings, places, goods, food etc, in the first unit it is inevitable to include so many items as an introduction to the French language.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the signs of culture are tracked in French coursebooks at the A1 and A2 levels. As A1 and A2 are beginning levels, it is not surprising to see few items about *perspective* as it requires a higher level of language to comprehend those issues. At beginning levels, more visual and concrete themes are handled. Distribution of *product* and *practice* is higher than *perspective* and *person*.

Each coursebook elaborates on culture in different ways. In some coursebooks, cultural aspects can be seen explicitly and in some, they are given implicitly. Each language reflects the culture in its own way. Foreign language learners may not be competent enough to evaluate the cultural elements, it is the language teacher's responsibility to convey cultural aspects of the language appropriately and also make cross-cultural comparisons conveniently.

Sociolinguistic competence is one of the most important skills that foreign language learners are supposed to acquire. Learning a language includes knowing the pragmatics, convenience, registers, and appropriateness in addition to proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and other language skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Knowing the cultural aspects and cultural appropriateness of a language cannot be enhanced only through textbooks. Knowing such elements of language requires the learners to spend time with native language learners and have real-life experience in the country where the language is spoken. Language teachers may not be knowledgeable enough about all the cultural aspects of the language unless the language is their mother tongue.

In coursebooks, elaboration of universal human values like respect, honesty, trustworthiness, etc. should also be emphasized for sound cross-cultural communication and effective language learning. Knowing universal values helps in understanding cultural values and enhances sociocultural competence in language use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For further studies, B1, B2 and C1 levels can be evaluated according to the inclusion of cultural aspects in teaching French as a foreign language.

The content area about sociocultural competence and cultural aspects can be extended with larger subtopics.

### Ethical Permission

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to

the author for any violations that may arise regarding the article. As the current study is a coursebook evaluation and analysis research, no ethical permission is required.

**Authors' Statement of Contribution:** The author's contribution to the study is 100%.

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