



Intercultural Pragmatic Features in Iranian EFL Textbooks: A Content Analysis of a Locally Developed EFL Textbook Series across Proficiency Levels and Activity Types

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Abstract: Despite growing global interconnectedness, many language programs inadequately prepare learners for real intercultural communication. This study examined the representation of intercultural pragmatic features in a locally produced EFL textbook taught in a nationwide language center in Iran. The analysis was done using six features, namely, *sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness, empathetic engagement and perspective coordination, adaptive communication and interactional negotiability, inferencing, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence*. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on six intermediate and advanced textbooks from the *English Series* used in a nationwide language center. The study systematically analyzed different textbook components. Odd-numbered units from intermediate and even-numbered units from advanced textbooks were sampled. Features were coded into six categories in NVivo, and repeated verification was used to ensure coding consistency. The analysis identified 119 instances of intercultural pragmatic features. Of all six features, sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness appeared most frequently. However, other features were underrepresented. Moreover, advanced textbooks include 91 examples, whereas intermediate textbooks have only 28; the results point to a significant proficiency-level gap that could hinder equitable development of intercultural pragmatic competence. Based on the activity-type analysis, intermediate materials relied primarily on dialog and reading passages, while advanced materials used more listening and speaking tasks on intercultural pragmatics; however, writing tasks were rare in the series. The findings suggest a revision of textbook evaluation frameworks, enhancing intercultural pragmatic activities in learning materials (including writing tasks). Also, preparing curricula that address level-based disparities and explicitly teach pragmatic skills to underrepresented students.

Keywords: Activity Type, EFL Textbooks, Textbook Evaluation, Intercultural Pragmatic Competence, Locally Developed Materials, Proficiency Level, Qualitative Content Analysis.

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Introduction

Intercultural pragmatics has become increasingly important in second language teaching settings since communication in intercultural contexts occurs between interlocutors who do not share the same linguistic backgrounds, cultural systems, values, or social norms (Kecskes, 2014, 2016; McKay, 2018). Language functions as much as a cultural and social behavior as a linguistic code, through which people co-create meaning with others who may approach the same communicative situation from different semiotic and experiential starting points (McConachy, 2018). This is particularly important in EFL contexts, where learners may have interactions with native English speakers, but also with speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, whose pragmatic expectations may be quite different from those that the learner has experienced in classroom instruction (McKay, 2018). Thus, EFL education should promote the development of intercultural pragmatic competence, which is made up of sociocultural awareness, interactional appropriateness, empathy, inferencing, pragmatic motivation, adaptive communication, and strategic competence as intertwined constituents of communicative ability (Byram, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kecskes, 2023).

Textbooks may be important in developing such competence, as they still constitute one of the main sources of language input, cultural content and classroom activity in many EFL contexts, especially where learners have access to authentic English outside the classroom to a limited extent (Barron, 2016). They determine the cultural topics, dialogs, reading passages, listening activities and speaking tasks that learners will be exposed to, thus shaping the kind of pragmatic and intercultural knowledge that learners will acquire. Yet, the mere presence of cultural content does not automatically lead to a textbook developing intercultural pragmatic competence.

In language education materials, some of existing international textbooks may represent culture as an amalgamation of customs, people, places, habits (and social norms) and daily lives of the people, nevertheless, they pay less attention to the way language is used and interpreted by the user in the context of intercultural communication (Hu & McKay, 2014; Matsuda, 2002; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021; Nguyen, 2011; Shin et al., 2011). As a result, language learners who are using these materials would be able to learn about and somehow understand cultural facts, but they may fail to get the implicit meanings, cope with misunderstandings, adjust their language based on contextual requirements, and communicate appropriately in intercultural situations requiring flexible and context-sensitive pragmatic judgment. In this regard, previous research focusing on EFL textbooks revealed that

internationally and locally developed textbooks give far too limited or unbalanced attention to the pragmatic and intercultural features; consequently, learners using these materials may remain insufficiently prepared for the communicative demands associated with intercultural English use (Jiang & Deng, 2022; Matsuda, 2021; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020; Tóth et al., 2026). In the Iranian EFL context in particular, the existing locally developed textbooks tend to place greater emphasis on linguistic forms and structural aspects of language, whereas they pay comparatively less attention to communicative, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions, a tendency that appears to reflect the established priorities of the curriculum as well as broader institutional constraints (Aghazadeh, 2015; Dahmardeh, 2009; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014).

To address the gaps in the literature concerning the investigation of intercultural pragmatic features in locally developed Iranian EFL materials, the present study examined the representation of six intercultural pragmatic features in the intermediate and advanced textbooks included in *the English Series* used in Iran. These books were published by the Iran Language Institute (ILI). It serves as an important case for investigation, as it is a nationwide, state-supported language institution that uses centrally developed textbooks across its branches. The present study, therefore, examined six textbooks from the ILI English Series: Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Intermediate 3, Advanced 1, Advanced 2, and Advanced 3.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background: Intercultural Pragmatics in EFL Education

Intercultural pragmatics helps explain how people rely on a variety of linguistic and cultural points to understand and interpret meanings across languages and cultures (Kecskes, 2014, 2016; Liddicoat, 2024). In this paradigm, communication does not involve encoding and decoding of predetermined meanings but is a dynamic process that involves the construction of meaning through interaction in a particular sociocultural context that determines what is communicated and how it should be interpreted (Kecskes, 2023). An intercultural language learning approach suggests that learners must be able to understand different ways of using language in different contexts and negotiate appropriateness through interaction and not rely on cultural conventions only (McConachy, 2018; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021).

The sociocognitive theory of intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2014), especially significant for this study, holds that participants have previous knowledge, personal experience, cultural background and linguistic skills before interacting but are consistently modifying their comprehension throughout the interaction in the context of the developing

communicative situation (Kecskes, 2014, 2023). It is crucial when it comes to EFL environments since the classroom may give students linguistic structures and culture-related knowledge, but in real intercultural communication, there is a need to understand hidden meaning, take into account contextual clues, cope with unpredictable events and overcome misunderstandings that may not be prepared for by the classroom environment.

Pragmatic competence cannot be gained merely through the imitation of native speaker norms. In order to make oneself understood, understand others, negotiate meaning, and use communication strategies in intercultural interactions (McKay, 2018), one should be able to communicate flexibly and adaptively. This view corresponds to approaches to intercultural competence that involve the understanding of cultural diversity, openness to various perspectives, and mediation of meaning and values across cultures (Byram, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021; Taguchi, 2009).

Intercultural Pragmatic Competence and Its Key Features

Intercultural pragmatic competence is a critical prerequisite for successful L2 communication. It encompasses the social, cultural, cognitive, affective, motivational, and strategic aspects of communicative ability in intercultural situations. Furthermore, it extends beyond the knowledge of isolated pragmatic routines or general cultural awareness (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kecskes, 2023; Taguchi, 2009). By considering Kecskes' intercultural pragmatic theory (2014, 2023) and, more importantly, previous studies, especially that by Abolhasanpour et al. (2026), which developed and validated six key components for assessing intercultural pragmatics teaching strategies in foreign language education, the present study operationalizes the construct in terms of six analytically distinct but interrelated features: *sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness*, *empathetic engagement and perspective coordination*, *adaptive communication and interactional negotiability*, *inferencing*, *pragmatic motivation*, and *strategic competence*.

Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness—an individual's understanding of the social norms, cultural values, roles, relationships and contextual expectations that govern language use—is foundational because misunderstanding may occur when they know the linguistic form but do not understand how it functions socially, a gap that often results in pragmatic failure across cultural boundaries (Byram, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kecskes, 2023). Central as well are empathetic engagement and perspective coordination since successful intercultural communication requires that one understands how others may feel, think, and interpret the same situation differently, a capacity that extends

beyond emotional sympathy to include communicative openness and sensitivity to alternative interpretive frameworks (Byram, 1997; McConachy, 2018; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability refer to people's ability to adjust their communication based on context, other speakers' behavior, and the evolving flow of interaction. This is especially important because intercultural encounters often involve interlocutors who do not fully share pragmatic norms and who may therefore need to clarify, reformulate, accommodate, or explain intention (Kecskes, 2014; McKay, 2018; Tajeddin et al., 2018). Another key feature is inferencing, as the pragmatic meaning is not always stated explicitly but is implied through context, tone, shared knowledge, and cultural assumptions. Second-language learners may understand the literal meaning but may not grasp the intended meaning in indirect requests, polite refusals, humor, or cultural allusions (Haugh, 2012; Kecskes, 2023; Taguchi, 2009). Subsequently, pragmatic motivation refers to learners' tendency to pay attention to sociocultural meanings and to use their linguistic resources to communicate despite uncertainty or obstacles. This readiness is a precondition for pragmatic development through noticing and use (Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012; Takahashi, 2005). Finally, strategic competence is the verbal and non-verbal strategies used by learners to solve communicative problems, to compensate for their linguistic or cultural limitations and to repair misunderstandings, including clarification, paraphrasing, comprehension checking, and softening disagreement (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Kecskes, 2023).

EFL Textbooks as Sites for Intercultural Pragmatic Representation

There are many reasons why EFL textbooks are pedagogically relevant since they represent an important source of linguistic input, cultural material, and communicative models for EFL contexts where learners do not have much chance to encounter English beyond classroom walls (Barron, 2016; Vellenga, 2004). The two aspects of the textbook evaluation under consideration are cultural representation in the form of cultural issues, practices, and materials on different communities and intercultural pragmatic representation, meaning an opportunity for learners to understand how speakers create meanings, manage relationships, express politeness, interpret intentions, and solve misunderstandings in intercultural interactions (Kecskes, 2014; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021; Taguchi, 2009). However, it is possible to claim that the consistent finding in the relevant literature is that while textbooks may include cultural material, there is no metapragmatic information, context explanations,

or reflection tasks included to foster intercultural pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Vellenga, 2004).

Previous Studies on Culture, Pragmatics, and Intercultural Content in EFL Textbooks

Studies on international and local EFL textbooks highlight continuous trends in the inadequate representation of pragmatics and intercultural dimensions. Studies of pragmatic aspects indicate that while textbooks provide students with different speech acts or pragmatic features, there is insufficient information related to the sociopragmatic aspects affecting their use, like power, social distance, imposition, and appropriateness (Barron, 2016; Farashaiyan et al., 2018; Jiang & Deng, 2022). Vietnamese national textbooks were also studied regarding their pragmatic content, and it was concluded that there were some issues with their development, which could limit the exposure of learners to certain pragmatic choices to be made in real life (Ton Nu & Murray, 2020). In addition, it is reported that in some international ELF textbooks, some cultures are over-represented, and as a result, learners will develop false impressions about the appropriate use of language (Keles & Yazan, 2023).

Regarding the Iranian context, it has been observed that the textbooks designed by the locals always prioritize the structural and grammatical aspect of learning over the communicative and cultural aspect of language learning (Aghazadeh, 2015; Dahmardeh, 2009; Moghtadi, 2014; Rahimpour & Hashemi, 2011). The studies conducted on state-run schools' textbook series used in Iran (Prospect and Vision series) have revealed poor development of intercultural competence and a lack of exposure to various cultures and intercultural knowledge through the books (Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018; Maghsoudi, 2020; Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh, 2019; Shirsavar & Kiani, 2023). Comparatively, it has been seen that the international textbooks provide more exposure to the intercultural aspect of the learning process than locally produced books in Iran (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2023; Rahbarmah et al., 2024). In addition, it is likely that the locally developed books in Iran may face constraints from institutions due to ideological influences while developing the cultural content (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014; Jorfi et al., 2022). However, the specific issue of the representation of intercultural pragmatic features rather than general cultural content in these materials is underexplored.

Research Gap and Research Questions

This study aims to redress three limitations identified in past studies. First, while some studies have investigated the characteristics of intercultural pragmatics (IP) (Abolhasanpour

et al., 2026; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014), none have systematically analyzed the specific features of IP within textbooks or conducted activity-type analyses. Second, most studies on pragmatics have mostly dealt with speech acts and pragmatic input (Barron, 2016; Farashaiyan et al., 2018; Kecskes, 2023; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021) with less attention paid to such aspects as inferencing, perspective coordination, interactional negotiability, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence. Third, not many studies have addressed the issue of distribution of these aspects across proficiency levels and activity types, although the scaffolded progression across proficiency levels is acknowledged as a key prerequisite of pragmatic development (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2009; Takahashi, 2001, 2005). This study tries to redress these gaps by posing the following four research questions:

1. What intercultural pragmatic features are reflected in the locally-developed EFL textbook series?
2. What is the distribution of these features across intermediate and advanced proficiency levels?
3. How are these features distributed across the different types of textbook activity?
4. What do the patterns of inclusion, imbalance, and underrepresentation suggest about the sequencing and pedagogical orientation of intercultural pragmatic content in the series?

Methods

Design

The present study adopted a qualitative content analysis design to examine how intercultural pragmatic features are represented in a locally developed EFL textbook series. The design is suitable because it allows for the systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of patterns within textual and pedagogical materials. Since the focus was not only on counting intercultural pragmatic features but also on understanding how they were embedded in textbook texts and activities, this method was appropriate. The analysis was guided by six intercultural pragmatic features developed from the theoretical and empirical literature (Abolhasanpour et al., 2026). Frequency counts were also used to support the qualitative analysis and show the relative distribution of features across proficiency levels and activity types.

Corpus

The corpus of this study consisted of six textbooks from *the English Series*, namely, *Intermediate 1*, *Intermediate 2*, *Intermediate 3*, *Advanced 1*, *Advanced 2*, and *Advanced 3*, used in the Iran Language Institute, with a nationwide network of branches and a centrally developed instructional program. Language Institute (ILI). ILI is one of the leading language education institutions in Iran, which is supported by the Ministry of Education with many branches across the country. The selected textbooks were developed and revised by the Research and Planning Department of ILI and were originally published between 2004 and 2008. They were selected because they are locally produced EFL series used across different proficiency levels. The intermediate and advanced levels were selected because they include different types of activities—readings, listening materials, and productive activities—which provide extended contexts for examining IP features compared to the previous levels.

The textbooks include dialogs, reading passages, listening exercises, speaking activities, and writing tasks. These components were all relevant because intercultural pragmatic features may appear not only in explicit cultural content but also in communicative exchanges, activity prompts, discussion questions, listening scripts, and reading texts. Intermediate books mainly provide structured exposure through dialogs, short texts, and controlled communicative tasks, while advanced books include more extended readings, listening materials, discussion topics, and activities requiring interpretation and reflection. Thus, the corpus allowed comparison across intermediate and advanced levels.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework was developed from Intercultural Pragmatics Theory and related work on intercultural language learning and L2 pragmatics. Its development was primarily deductive because the six categories were identified from the theoretical synthesis before the main coding began. Nevertheless, the application of each category required interpretation of the textual and pedagogical context in which a possible feature appeared. The six features described above guided the analysis and made it possible to examine whether textbooks presented culture only as information or also provided opportunities for learners to interpret meanings, coordinate perspectives, negotiate interaction, and manage communicative problems. Table 1 presents the operational criteria used to identify the six features in the textbook materials.

Table 1. Operational Framework for Coding Intercultural Pragmatic Features

Feature	Operational Coding Criterion	Typical Indicators in Textbook Content
Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness	A feature presented or required attention to social norms, cultural values, interpersonal roles, relationships, formality, or contextually appropriate language use.	Cultural comparisons, social expectations, politeness choices, appropriate behavior, and variation across situations
Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination	A feature directed attention to the feelings, experiences, viewpoints, or interpretations of another person or social group.	Perspective-taking, emotional support, consideration of alternative viewpoints, and interpretation of experiences from different positions
Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability	A feature involved adjustment of communicative behavior in response to an interlocutor, situation, or developing interaction.	Accommodation, reformulation, explanation, adjustment of wording, and negotiation of meaning
Inferencing	A feature required interpretation of meaning that was not stated directly but could be derived from context, tone, background knowledge, or cultural assumptions.	Indirect requests, implied criticism, polite refusals, humor, unstated intentions, and cultural references
Pragmatic motivation	A feature encouraged attention to sociocultural meaning or willingness to participate in communication despite uncertainty or difficulty.	Willingness to communicate, engagement with unfamiliar perspectives, continued participation, and reflection on the value of intercultural communication
Strategic competence	A feature presented or required a specific strategy for preventing, managing, or repairing a communication problem.	Clarification requests, paraphrasing, comprehension checks, compensation, explanation, and repair of misunderstanding

Although the categories were related, their boundaries were maintained according to the primary function of each feature. Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability concerned broader adjustment to an interlocutor or developing situation, whereas strategic competence involved a more identifiable resource used to prevent or repair a communication problem. Similarly, general information about another culture was coded as sociocultural awareness only when it had a meaningful connection to social expectations, contextual interpretation, or appropriate language use.

Data Collection and Coding Procedures

The data collection process involved systematic analysis of dialogs, reading passages, listening exercises, speaking activities, writing tasks, visual prompts, and discussion questions in the six selected textbooks. Dialogs were examined because they provide models of social interaction. Reading passages and listening exercises were examined because they can include cultural meanings, pragmatic cues, and inferential content. Besides, speaking and writing activities were analyzed for their potential to engage learners in communicative situations, negotiate meanings, or reflect on intercultural points. To make the analysis manageable, selected units from each textbook were analyzed. In the intermediate textbooks, odd-numbered units were included, whereas in the advanced textbooks, even-numbered units were included. This fixed alternating-unit procedure was used instead of selecting units according to their topics or apparent cultural content. It distributed the sample across different parts of each textbook and reduced the possibility of selecting only units that appeared especially rich in intercultural material. The procedure was not intended to establish direct thematic equivalence between individual odd- and even-numbered units; comparisons were made between the two proficiency levels as a whole.

The selected units were read several times before coding. The unit of analysis was a meaningful textual or activity-based feature that could be interpreted within its immediate context. Depending on the textbook component, a feature could consist of a dialog turn or exchange, part of a reading passage, a listening prompt, a speaking question, a writing task, an instructional prompt, or a visual accompanied by an activity. The feature had to show a clear connection to at least one of the six operational categories. During the preliminary coding, the identified features were compared with the category definitions, and unclear boundaries were refined before the complete sample was coded. Each relevant feature was then assigned to the most directly represented feature by its communicative or pedagogical function. Where a feature appeared related to more than one feature, the surrounding text and

task instructions were examined to determine its primary focus. Ambiguous instances were revisited during the later review of the coded materials. In order to increase credibility and dependability, these processes were done by two different trained coders independently. They then discussed discrepancies and reached an agreement on the final themes.

NVivo 10 was used to organize coded data, retrieve coded features, and compare patterns across textbooks, levels, and activity types. The software was used for data organization and retrieval, while the interpretation and classification of the features were based on the analytical framework. After coding, frequencies were calculated across intermediate and advanced textbooks, and the activity type of each coded feature was recorded. Exemplar excerpts were then selected to illustrate the main patterns in the results. Additionally, to support confirmability, the coded extracts and category assignments were retained in NVivo and repeatedly checked against the original materials. Transferability was facilitated through the description of the institutional setting, textbook series, proficiency levels, sampling procedure, and analytical categories (Elo et al., 2014).

Results

Overall Representation of Intercultural Pragmatic Features

The first research question examined how intercultural pragmatic features were illustrated in the locally developed EFL textbook series. The analysis identified 119 instances of intercultural pragmatic features across the six textbooks. As shown in Table 2, the representation was uneven. Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness were the most frequent features, with 59 instances, accounting for 49.6% of all coded instances. This was followed by empathetic engagement and perspective coordination, with 33 instances (27.7%). Whereas adaptive communication and interactional negotiability were identified 12 times (10.1%), while pragmatic motivation and strategic competence appeared only 6 times (5.0%) and 5 times (4.2%), respectively. Inferencing was the least represented feature, with only 4 instances (3.4%).

Table 2. Frequency of Intercultural Pragmatic Features

Feature	Intermediate, n (%)	Advanced, n (%)	Total, n (%)
Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness	14 (50.0)	45 (49.5)	59 (49.6)
Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination	10 (35.7)	23 (25.3)	33 (27.7)
Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability	2 (7.1)	10 (11.0)	12 (10.1)
Inferencing	1 (3.6)	3 (3.3)	4 (3.4)
Pragmatic motivation	1 (3.6)	5 (5.5)	6 (5.0)
Strategic competence	0 (0.0)	5 (5.5)	5 (4.2)
Total	28 (100.0)	91 (100.0)	119 (100.0)

Note. Percentages in the intermediate and advanced columns were calculated within each proficiency level. Percentages in the total column were calculated from all 119 coded instances.

The distribution shows that the series provided considerably more content related to cultural norms, social expectations, and appropriate language use than to the interpretation of implied meaning or the strategic management of communication problems. Although empathetic engagement was also represented to some extent, the four remaining features together accounted for fewer than one quarter of the coded instances.

Distribution of Intercultural Pragmatic Features across Proficiency Levels

The second research question examined the level-based distribution of intercultural pragmatic features. As Table 2 shows, advanced textbooks accounted for 91 instances (76.5%), while intermediate textbooks contained only 28 (23.5%). Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness appeared 14 times at the intermediate level and 45 times at the advanced level. Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination appeared 10 and 23 times at the intermediate and advanced levels, respectively. Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability appeared only twice in intermediate textbooks but 10 times in advanced materials. Inferencing and pragmatic motivation each appeared only once in intermediate textbooks, whereas strategic competence showed the most noticeable difference, with no instance at the intermediate level and five at the advanced level.

The within-level percentages provide further context for these raw frequencies. Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness accounted for approximately half of the instances at both levels: 50.0% at the intermediate level and 49.5% at the advanced level. The major difference was therefore not simply the relative dominance of this feature, which remained similar across levels, but the much larger number and wider range of coded opportunities in the advanced textbooks. Empathetic engagement represented 35.7% of the intermediate instances but 25.3% of the advanced instances, while adaptive communication, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence collectively occupied a somewhat larger share of the advanced materials.

No intermediate feature met the operational criterion for strategic competence as its primary function. In particular, the sampled intermediate units did not explicitly present clarification requests, paraphrasing, comprehension checks, or communication repair as strategies for managing difficulty. Such strategies appeared only in the advanced textbooks. The numerical comparison represents the distribution of coded instances within the sampled units and not a rate adjusted for the number of pages, words, or activities at each level.

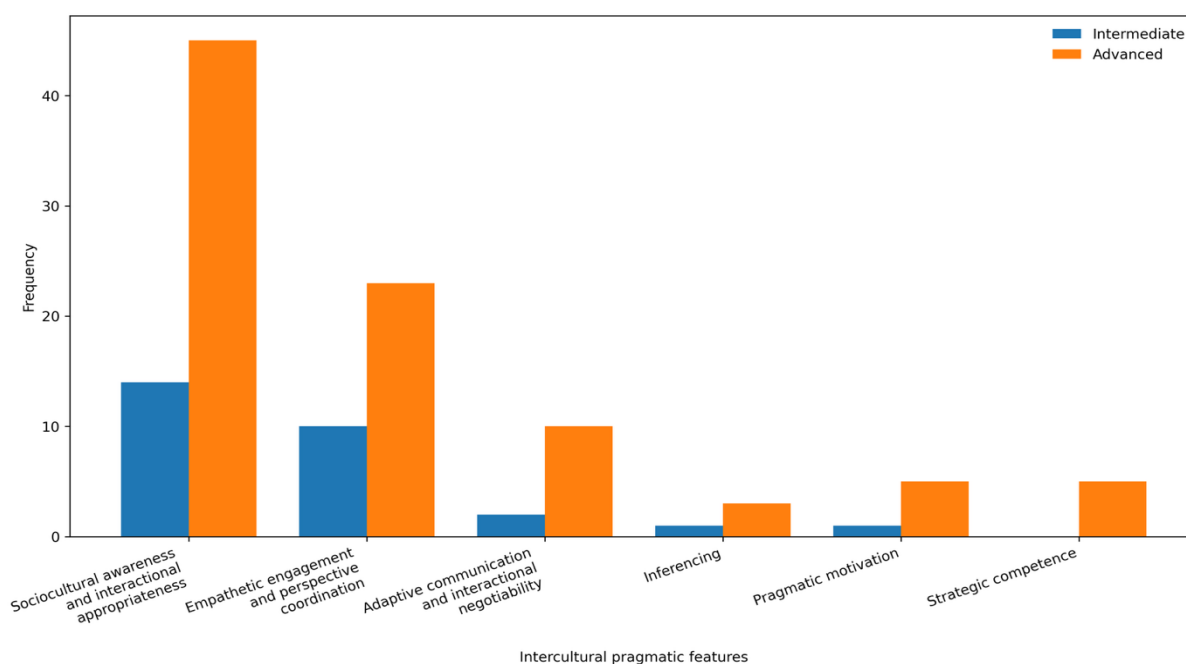


Figure 1. Distribution of Intercultural Pragmatic Features across Intermediate and Advanced Textbooks

Distribution of Intercultural Pragmatic Features across Activity Types

The third research question examined the activity-type distribution of intercultural pragmatic features. As shown in Table 3, the features appeared across dialogs, reading passages, listening tasks, speaking topics, and writing tasks, but with pronounced differences between proficiency levels.

Table 3. Activity Type Distribution for Intercultural Pragmatic Features

Feature	Activity type	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness	Dialogs	5	9	14
	Readings	8	15	23
	Listening tasks	1	9	10
	Speaking topics	0	9	9
	Writing tasks	0	3	3
Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination	Dialogs	6	0	6
	Readings	1	3	4
	Listening tasks	3	17	20
	Speaking topics	0	2	2
	Writing tasks	0	1	1
Adaptive communication and interactional negotiability	Dialogs	2	0	2
	Listening tasks	0	7	7
	Speaking topics	0	3	3
	Writing tasks	0	0	0
Inferencing	Dialogs	0	1	1
	Readings	1	1	2
	Listening tasks	0	1	1
Pragmatic motivation	Listening tasks	1	3	4
	Speaking topics	0	2	2
Strategic competence	Listening tasks	0	4	4
	Speaking topics	0	1	1
Total		28	91	119

Across the entire corpus, listening tasks had the largest number of coded instances, with 46 of the 119 instances (38.7%). Readings accounted for 29 instances (24.4%), dialogs for 23 (19.3%), speaking topics for 17 (14.3%), and writing tasks for only 4 (3.4%).

At the intermediate level, dialogs and readings comprised the majority of the coded content. Dialogs accounted for 13 of the 28 intermediate instances (46.4%), readings for 10 (35.7%), and listening tasks for 5 (17.9%). No coded instance appeared in an intermediate speaking or writing activity. Sociocultural awareness appeared in eight readings and five dialogs, while empathetic engagement appeared mainly in dialogs, with six instances. Adaptive communication appeared in only two dialog examples, inferencing in one reading, and pragmatic motivation in one listening task.

At the advanced level, activity types were more varied. Listening tasks accounted for 41 of the 91 advanced instances (45.1%), followed by readings with 19 (20.9%), speaking topics with 17 (18.7%), dialogs with 10 (11.0%), and writing tasks with 4 (4.4%). Empathetic engagement was especially common in listening tasks, with 17 instances. Adaptive communication appeared in seven listening tasks and three speaking topics. Strategic competence appeared in four listening tasks and one speaking topic.

Writing was the least represented activity type and occurred only in the advanced textbooks. The four coded writing activities addressed sociocultural awareness or perspective coordination; none placed inferencing, interactional negotiation, pragmatic motivation, or communication repair at the center of the task. Thus, the difference between the levels concerned not only the number of instances but also the range of activity types through which the features were presented. Intermediate learners encountered them mainly through dialogs, readings, and limited listening content, whereas advanced learners also encountered them through speaking and writing activities.

Sequencing and Pedagogical Orientation of the Content

The fourth research question examined feature-specific patterns of inclusion and underrepresentation across the series. Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness, with 59 instances, were represented through diverse activity types at the advanced level but mainly through controlled formats at the intermediate level. Examples included descriptive statements such as “people here go out of their way to be friendly” (Intermediate 2, Unit 1) and statistical cultural information such as “over 70 percent of women with children under 18 have another job besides that of mother and homemaker” (Intermediate 3, Unit 1).

The first example was coded as sociocultural awareness because it presented a generalized expectation about interpersonal friendliness in a particular social setting. The second presented information about social roles and employment patterns. In both cases, cultural practices were introduced as information, but learners were not required to examine how such generalizations might vary across speakers or situations or how they might influence the interpretation of language. At the advanced level, speaking tasks such as discussions of unusual laws and reflective questions about occupational categories across cultures required more explicit comparative thinking about sociocultural appropriateness.

Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination, with 33 instances, followed a similar developmental pattern. At the intermediate level, this feature appeared mainly through routine interpersonal situations, such as expressions of emotional support in dialogs. These examples focused on the immediate feelings or personal circumstances of individual speakers. In contrast, advanced textbooks presented this feature in contexts involving restorative justice, environmental issues, marriage practices, and literary discussion, including activities related to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Advanced 2, Unit 6). These activities involved several social or moral viewpoints and therefore required learners to consider perspectives beyond an immediate interpersonal exchange.

Inferencing, with four instances, and pragmatic motivation, with six, were not systematically integrated across the series. Only four features placed the interpretation of unstated or context-dependent meaning at the center of the activity. A stronger inferencing orientation would require learners to identify an implied intention, explain the contextual clues supporting an interpretation, or compare different possible readings of the same utterance. Such demands appeared only occasionally in the sampled units.

Strategic competence, with five instances, was absent from the intermediate textbooks. At the advanced level, it appeared through clarification, explanation, and meaning-management activities in listening and speaking tasks, including discussions of layered literary meanings and clarification of technical terminology. These instances were classified as strategic competence because they centered on identifiable procedures for resolving uncertainty or making meaning accessible, rather than on general adjustment to an interlocutor.

Discussion

The current study investigated the inclusion of intercultural pragmatic features in a locally produced EFL textbook series. Although the six features were presented in the materials,

their distribution indicates that intercultural pragmatics was mainly expressed through sociocultural knowledge and perspective-related content rather than through the interpretation, negotiation, and strategic management of meaning. The importance of the findings therefore lies not only in the unequal frequencies but also in the particular view of intercultural communication promoted through the texts and activities.

Sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness were dominant, followed by empathetic engagement and perspective coordination, while inferencing, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence appeared only in limited forms. This pattern supports the view that intercultural pragmatic competence cannot be reduced to knowledge of cultural practices or appropriate forms. It also requires learners to understand implied meanings, adjust their communication, consider alternative understandings, and deal with communication problems as they appear (Kecskes, 2014, 2023; McConachy, 2018; Taguchi, 2009). The findings further suggest that awareness-oriented dimensions are more readily incorporated into textbook readings, dialogs, and cultural information, whereas negotiation and repair require activities in which learners must respond to uncertainty or misunderstanding. The representation of intercultural pragmatics is therefore influenced not only by the topics selected but also by the types of tasks through which those topics are presented.

Since sociocultural awareness and interactional appropriateness made up almost half of all the identified instances, the series appears to favor descriptive cultural awareness and knowledge of social norms. This emphasis is not unimportant because learners need to understand how social context, interlocutor relationships, and expectations influence language use. However, cultural information alone provides a limited opportunity to examine how expectations differ, how generalizations may be questioned, or how speakers negotiate appropriateness when they do not share the same assumptions. At the intermediate level in particular, sociocultural awareness was mostly presented through readings, dialogs, and descriptive information rather than through tasks requiring comparison or pragmatic reflection. This resembles earlier findings that textbooks may include cultural and pragmatic material without providing sufficient contextual explanation, metapragmatic guidance, or opportunities to examine variation in language use (Barron, 2016; Farashaiyan et al., 2018; Jiang & Deng, 2022; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020).

The findings also converge with research on Iranian materials. Previous analyses of locally developed series, including Prospect and Vision, have reported limited cultural diversity and greater attention to linguistic form than to intercultural and communicative

dimensions (Dahmardeh, 2009; Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018; Maghsoudi, 2020; Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh, 2019). The present study extends this line of research by showing that imbalance also occurs within intercultural pragmatic competence itself. The problem was not simply the amount of cultural content; it concerned the concentration of that content in awareness and empathy and the limited attention given to inferencing, interactional negotiation, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence. It also concerned the way these features were distributed across proficiency levels and activity types.

Empathetic engagement and perspective coordination were represented more substantially, particularly at the advanced level, where listening tasks and reflective themes exposed learners to different viewpoints and emotionally or socially complex situations. Such opportunities are important for developing sensitivity to alternative perspectives (Byram, 1997; McConachy, 2018; Ting-Toomey, 2005). At the intermediate level, however, empathy was presented mainly through immediate interpersonal exchanges, such as emotional support between speakers. The difference between the two levels may reflect an intended progression from familiar interpersonal situations to wider social and moral issues. Nevertheless, it may also result from the longer texts and broader thematic content available in the advanced books. The pattern should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of a deliberate developmental sequence without further information about the design principles of the series.

Another notable finding was the limited representation of adaptive communication, inferencing, pragmatic motivation, and strategic competence. These features are particularly relevant to intercultural encounters because communicative meanings are not always explicit or shared in advance, and interlocutors may need to clarify, reformulate, accommodate, or repair their contributions (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Haugh, 2012; Kecskes, 2014, 2023). Their limited presence indicates that the sampled materials offered relatively few explicit opportunities to practice these processes. It does not, however, demonstrate that learners using the books necessarily fail to develop such abilities. Teachers may add explanations, supplementary activities, role-plays, or repair work, and learners may encounter pragmatic language through other educational and social sources. The findings concern the opportunities provided by the textbooks themselves rather than the competence ultimately developed by their users.

Strategic competence was not identified at the intermediate level and appeared only five times at the advanced level. One possible explanation is that the series treats communication strategies as more appropriate for learners with greater linguistic resources. Another possibility is that some strategies are expected to be introduced by teachers or are

embedded implicitly in classroom interaction rather than stated in the books. Nevertheless, clarification requests, comprehension checks, paraphrasing, and simple repair strategies do not necessarily require advanced proficiency. Their absence from the sampled intermediate materials may therefore represent a missed opportunity to introduce manageable strategies before learners face more demanding communicative tasks.

The difference between the proficiency levels also requires cautious interpretation. Advanced textbooks accounted for 76.5% of the coded instances, but the analysis was based on raw frequencies rather than rates adjusted for the number of pages, words, or activities at each level. Advanced books may contain more extensive texts and a larger number of open-ended activities, and the six coding categories may be more readily visible in such content. The difference cannot therefore be attributed entirely to inadequate sequencing. At the same time, sociocultural awareness accounted for approximately half of the coded instances at both levels, indicating that the overall orientation of the series remained relatively stable even as the number and variety of activities increased.

The activity-type findings provide further evidence of this orientation. Intermediate instances occurred mainly in dialogs and readings, whereas advanced instances appeared most frequently in listening tasks and were also found in speaking activities. Listening and speaking tasks can expose learners to contextual cues and require them to interpret or negotiate meaning more directly than descriptive passages. However, only four coded instances appeared in writing tasks, all at the advanced level. Reflective and interactional writing can support intercultural pragmatic development by requiring learners to consider audience, stance, politeness, implied meaning, and alternative perspectives. The limited writing component therefore reduced opportunities to extend intercultural pragmatic reflection beyond oral and receptive activities (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021).

The findings should also be considered in relation to the institutional setting in which the series was developed. As centrally produced materials used across a nationwide language institute, the books must serve a common curriculum and a wide range of classrooms. Such conditions may encourage content that is controlled, teachable, and consistently deliverable across branches. Earlier Iranian research has also indicated that locally developed materials may be shaped by institutional and ideological decisions concerning which cultural content is suitable for inclusion (Jorfi et al., 2022; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). The present analysis cannot determine the intentions of the textbook developers, but the concentration on cultural information and controlled activities is consistent with these broader characteristics of locally produced Iranian materials.

On a theoretical level, the six-feature framework shows that intercultural pragmatic representation is not a single textbook quality that can be judged only by the presence or absence of cultural material. It includes several related dimensions that may receive very different levels of attention and may be presented through different pedagogical forms. The findings particularly highlight the distinction between representing sociocultural knowledge and creating opportunities for learners to negotiate, infer, and repair meaning. From a practical point of view, the series could provide more balanced support by introducing age- and level-appropriate inference tasks, perspective-taking activities, clarification strategies, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and reflective writing from the intermediate level onward. Such additions would not require removing the existing cultural material but would allow learners to use it as a basis for interpretation and interaction rather than encountering it primarily as information.

Conclusion

The study investigated the representation of intercultural pragmatic features in a locally developed EFL textbook series. Taken together, the findings indicate that the series recognizes the importance of culture and interpersonal perspective but gives considerably less attention to the processes through which meanings are inferred, negotiated, and repaired. Intercultural pragmatic content also becomes more varied at the advanced level, although its progression across levels remains uneven and strongly dependent on receptive and listening-based activities. The central issue is therefore not the complete absence of intercultural pragmatics but the selective manner in which it is represented. Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The analysis was limited to one locally developed series and to selected units from the intermediate and advanced books. The textbooks were originally published between 2004 and 2008, and their content may not reflect more recent developments in Iranian materials design or intercultural language education. The frequency comparisons were not adjusted for differences in the overall amount of content at each proficiency level. In addition, the application of the six-feature framework involved interpretive decisions, particularly where the boundaries between adaptive communication, strategic competence, and sociocultural appropriateness were not absolute. The framework also emphasizes selected social, cognitive, affective, motivational, and strategic dimensions and may not capture every aspect of intercultural pragmatic competence. Finally, textbook content cannot show how teachers mediate the materials, how learners respond to them, or what pragmatic abilities are developed in classroom practice.

The findings are therefore most transferable to similar locally developed and centrally administered textbook programs rather than to EFL materials in general.

The findings have implications for the groups involved in materials and curriculum development. Textbook developers can strengthen intermediate materials by adding explicit but accessible tasks involving implied meaning, clarification, reformulation, perspective-taking, and communication repair. They can also expand productive work through role-plays, problem-solving activities, and reflective or interactional writing. Curriculum designers can sequence the six features across proficiency levels so that inferencing and strategic competence are introduced gradually rather than appearing mainly in advanced materials. Textbook evaluators can examine not only which cultures and pragmatic forms are present but also whether learners are required to interpret, compare, negotiate, and respond through a balanced range of activity types. Teachers using the existing series may need to supplement descriptive cultural content with questions and activities that make pragmatic assumptions and alternative interpretations more visible. Future research may compare the ILI English Series with more recent locally developed and international materials, using corpus measures that allow the frequencies to be adjusted for differences in textbook length and activity volume. Classroom observation, teacher interviews, and learner-focused studies may also show how the available content is supplemented, interpreted, and practiced. Such work would clarify whether the imbalances identified in the materials remain visible in classroom instruction or are reduced through teacher mediation and learner engagement.

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