

CULTURAL CODES IN SOME TEXTS OF “VOICE OF AMERICA LEARNING ENGLISH

Mesut Ugurlu, page 63-76

ABSTRACT

Within the framework of the paper, the author elaborates on the issue of corruption and its harmful effect in several segments of social life.

It is emphasized that corrupt actions are a negation of the value system which is based on modern civilizational understandings. By denying the system of values, corruption creates a parallel system contrary to the normatively defined one, that is, it acts as its counterthesis and through it opposite effects are created, that is, a parallel system that is aimed at circumventing and breaking the established rules and creating a chaotic state.

In that direction, the author also presents the relationship between corruption and the rule of law, completely opposite concepts, where corruption is the negation of the rule of law. If the rule of law is in the direction of the correct application of norms by independent institutions with institutional and personal integrity of employees, then corruption is aimed at undermining such integrity and managing institutions in a way that allows abuse of public powers by individuals or groups.

The author emphasizes the impact of corruption on economic growth, the level of poverty and the existence of organized crime. All of these relationships have a common point of connection, which is the disruption of the financial system and enabling the enrichment of corrupt persons through the violation of legal norms.

The high level of corruption in a country has a strong negative effect on economic development, since state resources are spent in a way that is contrary to what is legally established, through various forms of abuse, mostly in the area of public procurement, through embezzlement, fraud and similar actions. In addition, the author emphasizes that the high degree of corruption does not create competitive conditions, but illegal monopolies are created and maintained as such, and foreign investors avoid such countries for investment because there is legal uncertainty and dysfunctional institutions.

Through the analyzing of the relationship between corruption and organized crime, the author emphasizes that countries with weak institutions and a high degree of corruption are particularly vulnerable, and there the groups that deal with organized crime grow stronger. The author points out that the more organized crime groups become financially powerful, the more their efforts to infiltrate politics, that is, institutions, and therefore also in the implementation of legal regulations, will strengthen. This is a particularly dangerous situation and if they succeed in such a goal, then there are serious problems in the functioning of the legal state.

Keywords: corruption , value system, poverty, organized crime, legal security, control mechanisms

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Introduction

Every country wants its culture to be adopted by other countries. For this reason, they conduct a lot of studies about culture. Some of these studies are about how to transfer their own culture. Another is about not being affected by other cultures. They use various instruments for this. The most important of these instruments are movies and TV series. For years, American culture has been coded to all countries via American movies. Nowadays, countries like Korea and Turkey are coding their cultures to other countries through the TV series. In addition to TV series and movies, web-based instruments can also be used for cultural code transfer. Web-based language education materials are another cultural coding elements. Language is already the most important cultural code tool in itself. In addition, cultural-themed motifs are incorporated into language education, and cultural coding is carried out.

According to the Turkish Language Association Dictionary, “culture” is defined as: *“The totality of all material and spiritual values created in the historical, social development process and created to transfer these to future generations and the means that demonstrate man's sovereignty over his natural and social environment, culture, product”* (TLAD, 2024). Ziya Gökalp defines culture as *“the harmonious whole of a nation's religious, moral, legal, rational, aesthetic, linguistic, economic and scientific life”* (2018: 39). According to Özdemir, culture has the feature of shaping the behavioral patterns and preferences of a group or individual and due to this feature, it is an important element that every state and its administrators attach importance to (2014: 351). According to Durmaz, culture consists of many different elements such as economy, technology, traditions etc. Which are hold societies together and offer them common values (2020: 324). According to TLAD, code is “The symbol of a piece of information”, “A series of symbols or symbols used to express or access information.” (2024). Therefore, while the combination of these two words, "Cultural code", is used as "each of the cultural assets, beliefs and practices included in the traditions and customs of a society" or "each of the cultural values that a society accepts as its own"; it defines the term "cultural coding" as "transferring the cultural values of a society to another society/individual" (Uğurlu, 2021: 3-4).

Within the scope of our study, English educational materials published by the VOALE website were examined. Due to the large number of materials on the website, a limitation was made. Only texts published between 08-21 September 2024 were examined. Cultural codes in the texts were identified and analyzed. It was revealed whether the identified cultural codes were compatible with the codes identified in Uğurlu's study (2021).

The close relationship between language and culture is clear. Language affects culture and culture affects language. Kapanadze's view on the subject is as follows: Cultural teaching/learning is an interdisciplinary field that develops with the contributions of fields such as psychology, linguistics, anthropology, education, and intercultural communication, and is not only within the boundaries of language educators. However, cultural learning and teaching has always been a subject of interest and study for language educators due to its nature and structure (Morain, 1986; Grittner, 1990; Bragaw, 1991; Moore, 1991; Byram and Morgan, 1994). In fact, in all studies such as Jorstad (1981), Seelye (1981, 1994), Crawford-Lange and Lange (1984), Byram (1988), Kramsch (1993), researchers have proposed models for teaching culture and language together and supporting each other (Kapanadze, 2018: 1588). According to Kapanadze, every word in the language has a cultural expression, value and representation. Folkloric products produced by the language, such as proverbs, idioms, and metaphors, gain meaning in the cultural context and reveal the sociological structure of societies, such as their traditions, customs and beliefs (2018: 1588). For this reason, one of the cultural coding tools is language teaching.

Analises of Some Text in VOALE

VOALE texts are already texts that provide language education in their own right. Sometimes the texts include articles that provide grammar information. Some also include proverbs and idioms. The article titled "How to Use 'Swimming' to Deal with Life's Situations" is one of these. The article titled "Words and Their Stories" provides the following examples. Here are some examples of the word "swimming" used in different meanings:

“The expression to swim downstream means using the easy way to get something done; swimming upstream means you take a more difficult path to do something;

swimming against the tide means you are fighting against very powerful forces; swimming with the tide or current means you have chosen an easier way to do something”.

Another article that teaches languages is titled “Avant-garde and Vanguard”. It is located under the subject heading “Ask a Teacher”. In the article, one of the VOALE users asks the following question: “Could you please explain (the) meaning of avant-garde and vanguard? And what's the difference?”. The text mentions the difference in meaning between these two words. However, the characteristics of English are briefly mentioned. For example, in this article, it is said that these words are of French origin: *“Both ‘avant-garde’ and ‘vanguard’ come from the French language. In fact, English has hundreds of words that come from French.”*

The article titled “What Is Your ‘North Star’?” is also one of the articles that teach language. The article talks about the difference in meaning between the words “literally” and “figuratively”. The literal and figurative meanings of the word “North Star” are explained in the article. The feature of these texts is that they teach American English. Another feature is that they code American culture. It has been determined that this awareness was taken into account when preparing VOALE texts.

Titled as “Apple Launches New iPhone ‘Built for AI’” article introduces an important American product, the iPhone 16 produced by Apple. Newer and superior features are introduced of iPhone 16 in the text. This article draws attention as an article that will benefit the export of American products and the development of the country’s economy by introducing and advertising an American product. In addition, Apple products such as Apple Watch and AirPods headphones are introduced in the article and the important features of other American products along with the iPhone 16 are conveyed to the readers. For example, the changes to Apple Watch also include additional health features, such as a sleep monitor tool that aims to identify the disorder sleep apnea. There is no promotion of companies or products that compete with American products in VOALE. For example, a Xiaomi or Samsung brand is not promoted like an iPhone.

In the article titled “World Produces 52 Million Metric Tons of Plastic Pollution Yearly”, the sentence *“More than two-thirds of that plastic comes from the Global South – a term that loosely describes developing*

countries” directly targets the region. Thus, it is indirectly stated that the USA and other developed countries are innocent in the pollution of the world.

The article lists the cities and countries with the highest levels of pollution:

“India leads the world in producing plastic pollution, with more than 9.3 million metric tons a year. That number is far more than double the next big-polluting nations, Nigeria and Indonesia. China, often criticized for pollution, is in fourth place but is making big improvements in reducing waste, Velis said. Other top plastic polluters are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Brazil. The top eight nations are responsible for more than half of the world’s plastic pollution, the study’s data suggests.”.

When you pay attention to the country names in this paragraph (India, Nigeria, Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Brazil), it is understood that none of them are allies of the USA: The text mentions about USA like this: *“The United States takes 90th place in plastic pollution with more than 47,600 metric tons. And Britain takes 135th place with nearly 4,600 metric tons, the study says.”.*

The article discusses the negative effects of environmental pollution. The aim is to influence readers by mentioning the damage to human health. Readers who read the article probably do not have sympathy for these countries that harm the environment and endanger human health. Of course, they have bad feelings towards countries that pollute the environment.

The article also includes indirect cultural coding. For example, while giving the amount of pollution as an example, New York City’s Central Park and the Empire State Building are mentioned and the name of the organization of the allied country that conducted the research is stated: *“The amount of pollution is enough to fill New York City’s Central Park with plastic waste as high as the Empire State Building, researchers at the University of Leeds in Britain.”.*

It is known that the US and China are rivals as two great powers. Despite this, both countries have a very high trade volume. Therefore, they are not enemies but they are not allies either. For this reason, the texts about China in VOALE do not praise it, but the content language is taken into consideration. In most texts, issues related to China are not directly discussed but indirectly. For example, in the article titled "Japan is a Good Fit for Chinese Intellectuals, Investors", it is explained that Chinese citizens migrate to Japan. With the sentence "Many Chinese who choose to move to Japan are wealthy or highly educated". It is understood that poor and low-educated Chinese people stay in their own country. However, the fact that Chinese people prefer the US is explained with the choice of a person named Jia Jia as follows:

"Jia Jia is a writer and speaker at the University of Tokyo. Eight years ago, he was briefly detained in China on suspicion of writing a call for China's top leader to resign. Jia planned to move to the United States. But after experiencing the coronavirus outbreak in China, he was in a hurry to leave, and his American visa application was delayed. So, he chose to go to Japan instead."

The article titled "Turkey's Homeless Dogs Find Families in Other Countries" criticizes the legal regulation in Turkey that will lead to the placement of approximately four million stray animals in shelters. It has been suggested that with this legal regulation, the animals could be euthanized or killed. Thus, Turkey is criticized for enacting a law that could brutally kill stray animals.

Although US politicians describe some countries as friends and allies, there are indications that this is not the case. In other words, the US may appear friendly towards some countries but implement policies in the opposite direction. Therefore, it may harm these countries without making it obvious. It usually does this action against the governments of the countries. It never shows hostility towards the citizens of that country. Even if some states are enemies, the US always behaves well towards the citizens of that country and wants them to be sympathetic. The article we are examining also confirms this policy of the US. Although the article implies that Turkey's policy is wrong, it also implies that Turkish citizens and especially activists are doing the right things. We can understand this

from the following sentence in the article: *“Animal rights activist Nilgul Sayar runs a shelter for dogs near Istanbul. She has sent hundreds of dogs overseas for adoption. She said demand for international dog adoptions has jumped since the law passed.”*

One of the coding methods seen in VOALE articles is to use sentences starting with "but". These sentences include the views of both sides. First, the other side's opinion is briefly stated, then the main subject is explained in detail:

“Supporters of the law, which passed in July, say it aims to prevent dog attacks, road accidents, and the spread of rabies. But critics say the law may lead to many dogs being euthanized, or killed. Animal lovers, activists and organizations are working to find homes for Turkey’s street dogs, including homes overseas.”

The article titled *“US Colleges Report Effects of Ban on Race-based Admissions”* discusses the ethnicity rates of students studying at some universities in the US. Thus, by mentioning that universities in the US have a multi-ethnic structure, people from other ethnic groups are implicitly encouraged to choose US universities. Again, this article indirectly explains that the US embraces every ethnic group and tries to emphasize that there is no ethnic discrimination, especially between blacks and whites.

One of the striking aspects of VOALE texts is that they highlight the right sides of their allies and the wrong sides of their non-allies. One of the most obvious examples of this is the article titled *“UN: Schools in Gaza Are Closed as Fighting Continues.”* The article states that schools in Gaza are closed because of war. According to article, the reason for this is Hamas’ attack on Israel: *“The Palestinian Education Ministry said all Gaza schools were closed and 90 percent of them had been destroyed or damaged in the war. The war started after Hamas gunmen attacked Israeli towns on October 7 killing about 1,200 people.”* The article also mentions the United Nations extending a helping hand to the Palestinians. As in other VOALE articles, it praises organizations in which the US has an influence:

"The United Nations urged Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip to attend medical centers to get children under the age of 10 years old vaccinated against polio. There have been breaks in the fighting to permit a vaccination campaign. The UN hopes to vaccinate 640,000 children in Gaza."

VOALE texts frequently mention US institutions. In this way, they advertise themselves. They never point out the shortcomings or weaknesses of their own institutions. They always highlight the aspects in which they are beneficial. One of the texts that conveys this situation is the article titled "*The Debate: Will AI Take Away Many Human Jobs?*". The article generally seeks to answer the question in the title, "*Will AI Take Away Many Human Jobs?*". While seeking an answer to this question, the names of some organizations operating in America are mentioned. These organizations such as: Indeed Hiring Lab, Carnegie Mellon University (in Pittsburgh-Pennsylvania), Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, Stanford University, Apple, Amazon, IBM, OpenAI (the creator of Chat GPT), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Alorica (Company in Irvine-California). Considering that in this short article (5 pages), it is clear that specifically codes American institutions.

Another method in VOALE that using to code of an American institutions is to only stated the work done by a single American institution in one text. An example of this is the article titled "*NASA Rocket Confirms Existence of Earth's Hidden Electric Field.*". As can be understood from its title, the article explains that NASA is a world-renowned space research organization, sent a rocket into space and that a hidden electric field was found as a result of the research conducted by the rocket. Thus, it is explained that the work conducted by an American organization has reached a research result that concerns the entire world. A similar example is in the article titled "*SpaceX Crew Returns to Earth after First Private Space Walks.*". The article describes a private space flight in which four amateurs crew returned to Earth after a journey that included their first spacewalk. In this type of coding, the beneficial aspects of American organizations are conveyed to the reader. Failures are never mentioned in the text. If a text describing the failure of an organization is encountered in VOALE articles, this organization is probably not a US organization.

Just as US institutions are coded, American artists are also frequently coded in VOALE texts. We see an example of this in the article titled **“Remembering American Actor James Earl Jones”**. The article explains that he died at the age of 93, that he was a world-famous actor, and that he became famous especially for his role as Darth Vader in the Star Wars films. The bad habits of the American actors in these articles are not mentioned. Their works, which stand out with their artistic personalities, are usually mentioned. Of course, while these personalities are being explained, American institutions are described, their cities are mentioned, and many similar subculture codings are presented to the readers. The following are also mentioned in this short (4 page) article: Oscar Academy Awards, Los Angeles, California, Hudson Valley area of New York, Star Wars movie series, The Lion King, Grammy, Mississippi, Michigan, University of Michigan, United States Army, Broadway, The Great White Hope, Emmy, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and CNN.

Some of the texts in the VOALE texts are not outward-oriented but inward-oriented. In other words, they are aimed at the people of the USA. More clearly, they are aimed at solving the problems of the people of the USA. One of the most important of these problems is the “obesity problem”. The USA is the country with the highest obesity problem with a rate of 30.60%, while Japan is the country with the least obesity problem with a rate of 3.2%. In addition, the obesity problem has been negatively affecting people in the United States (US), which is among the top five among developed countries, for a long time. According to the 2011-2012 evaluation of the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey of the United States of America (USA); 34.9% of adults aged 20 and over in the USA are obese. 16.9% of children and adolescents aged 2-19 are obese (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III (NHANES III), 2011). Likewise, according to the evaluation of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey conducted in 2016; 13.9% of the 2-5 age group is obese, 18.4% of the 6-11 age group is obese, and 20.6% of the 12-19 age group is obese. Estimates predict that the prevalence of obesity will reach 50% in many states by 2030 (Deleş, 2019: 21). Therefore, US sources draw attention to this problem that threatens its citizens on every platform. VOALE texts also draw attention to this issue from time to time. One of these texts is the article titled *“How Bad Are Ultraprocessed Foods?”* The article mentions that Americans eat

ultraprocessed foods every day. It is explained that these foods are harmful to health and make people fat. In this respect, this article is an article that contains a cultural code aimed at the American people.

One of the problems America has with its own citizens is the racial discrimination between blacks and whites. It is known that the USA has used various political and cultural elements as instruments to prevent this discriminatory approach, which is a "bleeding wound" since its establishment. The most important of these instruments is the cinema sector. Hollywood movies, which try to create an image that the black-white relationship is "good", "strong", "problem-free" and "friendly", have generally tried to give messages with scenarios where blacks and whites are friends with each other. Especially in Hollywood detective movies, one of the police officers who play the leading role and serve as partners is "black" and the other is "white". These police officers usually save each other's lives as required by the scenario. In this way, an attempt is made to create the perception among US citizens that there is no "racism" problem. Although there are many different ethnic groups living within the borders of the USA and there are some problems between these ethnic groups, the biggest problem is between groups that have racist approaches and thoughts. It is likely that this is why the USA is trying to use instruments to eliminate racism on every platform. One of these instruments is VOALE. In VOALE texts, it is generally coded that black and white racial discrimination is a thing of the past and that such a distinction no longer exists. One of these texts is the article titled "Black Women Mathematicians Receive Congressional Medals for Space Program Work". The article says that:

"The United States Congress has honored four women known as the 'hidden figures' of the space race with its highest civilian award" and that black women did not have such rights before is stated as follows: "The early space program employed hundreds of women to work as mathematicians at what is now NASA's Langley Research Center in Virginia. But, the Black mathematicians were not permitted to work with the white mathematicians because of racial separation policies at the time. The Black researchers' work went unrecognized for years."

Conclusion

In a globalizing world, it is natural and inevitable for countries to use language and the fastest means of communication, the internet, effectively in order to preserve their culture or to spread the local to the national and the national to the global. For this reason, most of the organizations in some countries carry out their work in this direction. VOALE is one of these organizations.

VOALE is a website that provides free language education and codes American culture while providing this education. Short articles are published on the site under various titles. Many of these articles code American culture. In this way, American culture is appreciated by other countries. As a result, people living in other countries want to live in the USA. This situation contributes directly to the brain drain and indirectly to the country's economy.

The article examines the texts on the VOALE website and the cultural codings contained in these texts. Some of these texts were selected as samples. For this purpose, a date range (September 08-21, 2024) was determined. As a result of the review, examples of coding American culture were identified. Many of these examples are the same as the methods identified in Uğurlu's study (2021). The identified methods are stated in our article.

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