

The Foreign Cultural Aspects Embedded in the English Textbooks of the Basic Stage in Jordan

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the foreign cultural aspects compared to the Arabic aspects in English teaching textbooks for the basic stage in Jordan. The study followed textbooks content analysis for cultural aspects at the level of word and picture for names, pets, women, celebrations and social events, addressing people, and social concepts and values. The data analysis of Action Pack series, accredited for grades 1-6 at public schools showed that the ratio of foreign aspects was 76% compared to the Arabic aspects 24%, which meant that the basic stage pupil is intensively exposed to the foreign culture that might cause cultural shock, lessening the motivation to learn English because of cultural distance. The researcher recommended re-evaluating the cultural content of these textbooks, to creating a balance between the Arabic/Islamic culture and the foreign culture, enabling pupils to relate English language to real life, and preventing adopting the foreign culture at the expense of the Arabic culture. (**Key words:** culture, cultural aspects, and textbooks).

Introduction: There is a tremendous pressure to learn English in Jordan. The general aim of TEFL has been educational and instrumental; it is one of the major disciplines of the curriculum from the basic stage throughout high school, and one of the tested competencies on college admission. Besides, English language competency is considered one of the major required qualifications for most of the jobs. English was taught in Jordan as a foreign language using British textbooks, which were gradually displaced by locally designed textbooks. The Jordanian English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks were modified several times. Until lately The Ministry of Education approved the contribution made by the Evaluation and Adaptation Committee, through assessment of the materials to the development of the Action Pack series in 2003.

The relationship between a foreign language and its culture is thought to be inseparable. "Language is culture" is repeatedly stated by scholars and curricular designers. Stern (1983:202-203) quoted (Sapir 1970:68) "Language, he said, is 'a guide to social reality'... and a symbolic guide to culture". Language teaching is a

العناصر الثقافية الأجنبية الموجودة في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية للمرحلة الأساسية الدنيا في الأردن

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ملخص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي مدى وجود العناصر الثقافية الأجنبية مقارنة بالعناصر الثقافية العربية في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية للمرحلة الأساسية في الأردن. واتبعت الدراسة منهج تحليل المحتوى للكتب المدرسية من الجانب الثقافي على مستوى الكلمة و الصورة للعناصر التالية: الأسماء، الحيوانات، والمرأة، والاحتفالات و المناسبات الإجتماعية، ومخاطبة الآخرين، ثم المفاهيم و القيم الاجتماعية. وأظهرت النتائج بعد تحليل سلسلة كتب (Action Pack) المعتمدة للمدارس الحكومية للصفوف من 1-6 أن نسبة العناصر الثقافية الأجنبية فيها تبلغ 76%. بينما العناصر العربية فتبلغ 24%. مما يعني أن التلميذ في المرحلة الأساسية يتعرض للثقافة الأجنبية بشكل مكثف مما يؤدي إلى حدوث صدمة ثقافية وتدني درجة الدافعية بسبب بعد المسافة الثقافية في محتوى هذه الكتب. أوصت الباحثة إعادة تقييم هذه الكتب من ناحية المحتوى الثقافي بحيث توازن بين الثقافة العربية الإسلامية و الثقافة الأجنبية حتى يستطيع الطالب ربط اللغة الانجليزية بحياته اليومية، ولا يتبنى عناصر الثقافة الأجنبية على حساب ثقافته الأصلية. (الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة، العناصر الثقافية، الكتب المدرسية).

twofold issue; First, teaching a language is teaching a culture; Higgs (1990:74) stated it is the recognition of an "unbreakable bond between language and culture that motivates our profession's implicit commandment that 'thou shalt not teach language without also teaching culture'". Pica (1994: 70) has also depicted this bond by raising the question "how necessary to learning a language is the learner's cultural integration". Second, English has risen over being a one culture-linked language. It has been taught as an international lingua franca in the modern world of massive influx of information. English speaking countries are not limited to England and the United States, so what culture does it carry? Mckay (2004) referred to determining the cultural basis of English, being one of the most complex problems in teaching English as an International Language (EIL). Kilickaya (2004) also pointed that the "case is different for English since it has become an international language". Consequently, and as long as the foreign culture is an unavoidable issue of foreign language teaching, it becomes the responsibility of the curriculum designers to shape up the cultural side of the syllabus. "The degree of emphasis on cultural knowledge of language proficiency is an educational decision dependent upon the role of language learning in a given society or for a given group of learners" Stern

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(1996:84). Along with the foreign culture, TEFL curriculum designers always emphasize the local Jordanian society characteristics which are part of the Arabic-Islamic culture. Therefore, the pre-assumption is that the EFL textbooks hold both the foreign and local cultural aspects.

Purpose and Question of the Study

The new series (Action Pack) was put into actual use in public schools in Jordan for grades 1 to 6. It addresses Jordanian pupils from 6 – 12 years old, who will be exposed to the foreign culture, while they are still sensitive to their own culture at this age. It has been cleared out that the culture is an unavoidable factor in English textbooks, and the local characteristics should be reflected at the same time for the above mentioned purpose. The problem of the study lies in the size and type of the foreign culture embedded in the basic stage compared to the local culture. There is an alarm here that those young pupils might absorb many of the foreign values represented through the foreign language, as many as, or more than the Arab and Islamic values. It might be true that even if some of the learners are not initially aware of the cultural associations attached to the language they are learning, others are, and will perceive them as being aligned with that culture. The importance of the "cultural baggage" that accompanies a language is not in the possibility of deliberately rejecting it, but it seems rather difficult to consider treating language and culture as if they were ultimately separable. This fact might be of more effect on young age groups perceiving this cultural baggage unconsciously. This study is an attempt to investigate the foreign cultural aspects, compared to the Arab-Islamic cultural aspects embedded in the English textbooks of the Basic stage in Jordan. It might be of beneficial assistance in re-evaluating the cultural content of this series. Given the fact that the series of Action Pack textbooks was not locally designed, but has only been evaluated and modified by a specialized Jordanian committee, and The New Guidelines of the TEFL in Jordan has not been published yet. The study raised the following question: What is the degree of the foreign cultural aspects compared to the Arab/Islamic cultural aspects embedded in the English textbooks of the basic stage in public schools in Jordan?

Review of Related Literature

Literature on the interactive relation between FL and culture is ample worldwide. On the importance of learning the foreign culture in order to understand its language, Chou (2004) presented a design of a course on how Western people express compliments in English, which would assist students in understanding that different cultural meaning and messages existed in the expressions and responses to the compliments from culture to culture. Kilickaya (2004) discussed the guidelines of designing FL curriculum, taking the cultural content and the new trends into consideration to meet different needs of various students. He assured the fact that any language is embedded in a particular

culture, and when learning a language we inevitably learn about its underlying culture. He pointed out some important factors that teachers should know to determine whether the material is appropriate for the learners, and if it tries to impose specific cultural information on them.

McKay's (2004) argument was about English as an international language which no longer needs to be linked to the culture of its native speakers, referring to different opinions around the world about including or excluding the culture in the context of English teaching material. The controversial result of the study was the use of Western characters in some language teaching materials that illustrated in subtle ways that the use of English necessitated the acceptance of Western values. In his investigation on the importance of cultural knowledge for foreign language learners, Olk (2003) tested 19 German university students, who completed a course in English, in translating an English article for publication in a German newsmagazine. The source text featured a significant number of British cultural references. The findings suggested that cultural knowledge played a central role in translation skills in the foreign language.

Tang (1999) gave a personal reflection of the place of "culture" in the foreign language classroom. Re-examining the notions of integrative and instrumental motivations to language learning, the author suggested that language and culture were inextricably linked, and as such we might think about moving away from questions about the inclusion or exclusion of culture in a foreign language curriculum, to issues of deliberate immersion versus non-deliberate exposure to it. Clouston (1997) focused on culture in L2 and FL teaching and learning in an effort to provide an understanding of culture in L2 and FL education. After providing background on culture in the classroom and the pedagogical literature, the researcher asserted that current L2 and FL teaching was indeed culture teaching. Al-Guayid (1987) investigated the relationship between some socio-cultural aspects and the learning of a foreign language. The socio-cultural aspects dealt with in Al-Guayid's study were social distance, psychological distance, attitudes of the learner towards the target language and its culture, and motivation to learn the target language. The results showed that these aspects influenced the learning ability and motivation of the foreign language learner.

Definitions of Terms

Culture: In order to specify the aspects of culture, it is essential to define the term "culture", which seems to have as many definitions as each scholar has looked at it. In the field of second and foreign language teaching, culture has its significance and a major role to play. Brown (1993:164) defined culture "as the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time". Stern (2002:12) found that "culture is no longer a set body of 'information' or 'facts' to be memorized, but a process

for generating frameworks of perception, a value system, and a set of perspectives". Stern (1996:207) defined culture as "it refers to typical behavior in daily situations, i.e. personal relationships, family life, value systems, philosophies, in fact the whole of the shared social fabric that makes up a society". Putting these view-points together, the operational definition of culture for this study is a life-style or a way of life which includes the value systems, typical behavior in daily situations, past and future perspectives for a group of people.

Cultural Aspects: Daily life or life style topics could include a vast array of detailed elements. Ardila (2001) found that the "cultural aspects can be portrayed under two similar – yet differing – approaches: an intercultural or culture – free approach; and a cross-cultural or culture- bound approach". Stern (1996) listed the cultural components prepared by several writers, like Brook who listed some sixty topics, such as childhood literature, discipline and pets. Chastain listed forty-four topics ranging from typical student activities and education to the social and economic systems, the press, good manners, women's liberation, and other topics. In the light of the adopted definition of the term (culture) and the (cultural aspects), the current study listed the following elements derived from Chastain's list, taken as indicators of the foreign culture: characters' names, pets, woman status, celebrations and social events, addressing people, social concepts and values. Also for the purpose of this study, the cultural aspects are categorized into two general types, firstly: inter-cultural or culture free, which means that the aspect is not related to any specific culture or country, and secondly: cross-cultural or culture-bound aspects which means that the aspect shows direct relation to a specific culture or country. The study excluded any other terms and words for their in-availability in the textbooks.

Textbooks: The study used the Action Pack series of TEFL textbooks accredited by the Ministry of Education for teaching English in public schools in Jordan for the Basic stage. These textbooks are used to teach the first six grades beginning from grade one to grade six. Each textbook consists of a student book, work book, teacher's book and a CD. Grade One is divided into two books, Starter and Action Pak 1. The books are interesting, colorful, and well edited. They cover language components and skills with varieties of activities that encourage communication, and gradual development of students' knowledge. Action Pack is a student centered series which require highly qualified teachers.

Method

Data Collection: The study was conducted using the analytical method in analyzing the cultural aspects at the level of words and pictures which appeared in the textbooks. Each item was counted once according to the occurrence in the textbook regardless of the frequency of the appearance in the same book. The cultural

aspects in each textbook were specified according to the definitions of aspects for this study and categorized into two groups: foreign and Arab. The aspects were differentiated according to their features as intercultural (culture – free) or cross-cultural (culture- bound). The data were analyzed using percentages of the occurrences of the aspects in the six textbooks. In order to answer the question of the study, a comparison was carried out between the percentages of the aspects of the foreign and Arab cultures.

Validity was assured by the decision of a jury of experts who refereed the data collection list of the cultural aspects. Reliability was assured by repeating the analysis by the researcher after two weeks from the first analysis, following Al-Hamadani et al (2005:124). Reliability coefficient of the analysis was 0.90, which is acceptable for the study.

The study also followed the qualitative approach in collecting data to support the findings. Six English teachers from different public school were interviewed on the effect of the cultural aspects on their pupils. Three female teachers from Marj Al-Hamam Basic Stage School in Amman and three male teachers from Al-Hashemyeh School for boys in Zarka were interviewed. The question asked was: What impressions do your students show on the cultural aspects mentioned in the study?

Findings: The adopted cultural aspects were analyzed according to their occurrence in words or pictures. Each item was counted once in each textbook even if it was repeated more than once. All the names appeared throughout the whole series were: Sammy, Randa, Laila, Adam, Ramzi, Ibrahim, Sara, Salem, Sami, Nahla, Majida, Aly, Zein, Vinnie, Maggie, Suzie, Iggy, Jack, Katy, Professor X, Mr & Mrs Green, Pam, Sally, Albie, Miss Quentin, Ted, Maria, Yoshiko, Tina, Frank, Helen, Silvio, John, Ben, Barney, Bee, and Jones. There are no Arab names in Grade One's textbook, but the seven foreign names were repeated several times in the same book.

Pets were a cat, a bear and a dog. Although the dog was only seen once, it was available in the book. Many animals were mentioned in the whole series, but the focus of the study was on the animals presented as house pets and locally familiar animals.

Women were seen in a lot of status and occupations. The numbers reflected the different pictures of women in each textbook. The celebrations and social events were the usual gatherings of family members and friends, reaching out to national festivals and celebrations.

Addressing people included the titles used to call certain occupations, men and women. And the social concepts and values referred to the common values brought out in the books such as time-respect and maintaining environment. The settings of these elements in the textbooks were bound to the certain culture without denial of availability in any other community.

Table (1): Occurrence of the cultural aspects in the textbooks of grades 1-6

Grades	Names		Pets	Women	Celebrations & social events	Addressing people	Social concepts & values
	Arabic	Foreign					
One	0	7	3	4	0	1	1
Two	0	7	3	4	2	1	1
Three	0	13	2	10	1	4	0
Four	2	19	3	13	1	4	2
Five	2	19	4	9	8	4	3
Grade 6	11	5	6	7	3	4	4

Table (1) shows the occurrence of the studied aspects throughout the textbooks of the six grades. Grade one showed the minimum size of the cultural aspects and grade 5 made the maximum size. It was noticed that grades 4 and 5 were the richest textbooks of

culture, while grade 6 made a radical diversion in the type of the cultural aspects in favor of the Arab, specially on the side of the names and social concepts and values.

Table (2): Classification of available cultural aspects

No.	Cultural Aspects	Total	Cross-Cultural				Inter-Cultural	
			Arabic		Foreign		No.	%
			No.	%	No.	%		
1	Names	37	11	30	26	70	8	22
2	Pets	10	8	80	2	20	10	100
3	Women	13	0	0	13	100	13	100
4	Celebrations and social events	8	2	25	6	75	6	75
5	Addressing people	4	0	0	4	100	0	0
6	Social concepts & values	7	0	0	7	100	7	100
	total	79	21	26.6	58	73.46	44	58

Table (2) indicates whether the available aspects were cross-cultural (related to a certain culture) or inter-cultural (could be related to any culture). The cross-culture Arabic column shows the aspects reflected the Arab culture within the settings and characters of the textbooks, and the foreign column referred to the aspects that were meant to reflect non-Arab culture, even if those aspects could be practiced and commonly seen in the Jordanian society. The inter-cultural column revealed that those aspects were not to be related to a certain community or country; they could be among both the cross-cultural and inter-cultural columns.

Names: There were seven main foreign characters acting throughout five out of the six grades' textbooks, the foreign names were: Vinnie, Maggie, Suzie, Iggy, Jack, Katy, and Professor X. Other names appeared once or more in the textbooks such as Mr. And Mrs. Green Pam, Sally, Albie, Miss Quentin, Ted, Maria and others. Only in grade four there were two Arab names, Sammy and Randa (p. 9). Names from specific nationalities appeared in grade five from Japan, Yoshiko; England, Tina; Australia, Uncle Frank; Canada, Helen; and Italy, Silvio. In grade six there was a radical change in the main characters of the textbooks turning into Arab names as Laila, Adam, Ramzi, Ibrahim, Sara, Salem, Sami, Nahla, Majida, Aly, and Zein. Other names appeared once or more such as John, Ben, Barney, Bee, and Jones. The ratio of the Arabic names to the foreign names was only (30%), where as the foreign names made (70%) of the names in the six textbooks.

Grade One teachers talked about their pupils' excitement when they were introduced to the characters with foreign names. One teacher said that "they were so happy to learn the foreign names, some of them went through the whole book looking for the characters". A

female teacher remarked that the Arabic characters take no action nor do they speak, "when an Arabic name appeared in the book, some of my pupils felt that this character would not understand English, the Arabic characters do not speak".

Pets: Two of the main characters of the textbooks were animals, Katy, a cat, and Iggy, a bear. These two animals lived inside the house like human beings. They talked and shared all daily activities with others including going to school and eating people's food. These two pets occupied five textbooks as main characters compared to all other animals mentioned. A dog, a duck and a parrot were mentioned but only a few times. In Grade Six's book there were no pet characters living inside the house and taking part in the daily life. Animals appeared as they normally live in the local community such as a cat, a dog, a bird in a cage, horses, camels and donkeys.

The teachers' remarks on this aspect were that their pupils liked the appearance of the pets, but they couldn't relate their occurrence to real life. More than one teacher repeated the same remark on the speaking cat and bear. The pupils inquired about this issue. "Do their animals speak English too?"

Women: The numbers in front of this category referred to the status and occupations that women appeared throughout the six textbooks. Foreign women appeared to be occupying several professions such as: a professor, a teacher, a student, a queen, an artist (painter and musician), a cashier, a police woman, a dentist, a doctor, a nurse, a house wife (cooking, cleaning the house and shopping) a car, a train and motorcycle driver, a post woman, a mother and a grandmother. They made (100%) of the mentioned women throughout the six textbooks. Nothing was mentioned about the occupation

of the Arabic woman which appeared only in the sixth grade textbook.

All the interviewed teachers reflected the same impression of their pupils that foreign “women are different, they don’t cover their hair and do all the jobs”. One teacher, however, repeated the statement of one of her pupils saying that “my mother is a dentist, may be the English people do not know that we have women teachers and dentists”.

Celebrations and Social Events: Beginning from the second grade textbooks, the characters were making birthday parties, dancing, and going out for picnics. In the fifth grade textbook, some festivals were included such as the Notting Hill Carnival (p. 34), and the following festivals were listed under the title: (*11 which festival?*) (p. 38):

1-The Damascus Flower Festival

2-The World Cup

3-Japanese New Year

4-The Olympic Games

5-The Lima Festival

6-Independence Day in Jordan

(75%) of these events could be considered intercultural aspects except for the (25%) which were related to the Arab-Jordanian society.

When teachers asked their pupils about the celebrations, they found that most of the pupils usually have birthday parties. When the religious occasions and feasts were mentioned by the teachers, the reactions of their pupils were as follows: “Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr are not celebrations”, “It is forbidden to speak about these feasts in English”, “English people do not know about these feasts”, and “these books are written for English children”.

Addressing People: Most of the characters were addressed by their names except a few of them such as: Professor X, Mr. and Mrs. Green. Miss Quintin, Mum and Dad. Even the Arabic parents in Grade Six textbook were addressed by mum and dad. The ratio was (100%) in favor of the foreign culture.

The reaction of the pupils’ expressed by the teachers on this issue was that they are used to addressing their female teachers by Miss in some schools. Otherwise all other addressing words were new to them. A teacher said “It is not easy to acquaint them to use Mr. and Mrs., while we only use: abu, uncle, aunt, grandmother, grandfather, and so on”. The teachers agreed upon this element that their pupils neither loved nor hated these words.

Social Concepts and Values: Almost all the textbooks laid stress on the concept of time, family, and friends. Focus on the social expressions such as “thank you” and “please” could be seen throughout all the six grades’ textbooks. In the sixth grade textbook there was a great

deal of emphasis on the cleanness of the school and the community (p. 41, 42, and 43). These concepts and values could be related to any culture, and nothing is known to be pure Arab or Islamic related. They made (100%) foreign culture related aspects.

All the teachers, reflecting the reaction of their pupils on the issue of values and concepts, said that “because they are embedded in their English books, they learn to use the polite word when speaking English, but when they shift to Arabic, they forget about them, specially ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.”

According to the above findings, the answer to the question of the study is that 24% of the cultural aspects were Arab compared to the foreign aspects which were 76% related to the foreign culture, and 58% intercultural aspects which could be related to any international culture.

Discussion and Recommendation

The studied textbooks seemed to be more of foreign culture bound, with very few signs of the Arab-Islamic-Jordanian culture. Pupils of grade one are introduced to five characters and two animals with foreign names on their first contact with English. Names have the greatest effect on young children, mainly relating the activities inside the classroom to their real lives. It may refer to the distance between the two languages Arabic and English, as Brown (1994:178) cited Schumann’s hypothesis on the cultural distance and its effect on language learning, saying that “the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language”. The impression reflected in the minds of these pupils is that English is restricted to the classroom. It was noticed that the names of the main characters were carefully chosen in order not to refer to any specific country. This assured the notion that English has become an EIL as Kilickaya (2004) pointed that English has become an international language.

A second grade teacher mentioned a remark relayed by a pupil about the characters; “I knew these children last year, they wore the same clothes and did not grow up. He asked: do English speaking children stay little all their lives?” This remark shed light on the implication of the repetition of these names; it seemed to create boredom and might lead to losing interest in and motivation towards English.

On the side of the pets, children are commonly known to love pets and accept them around, both in life or in their books. Pets could be considered an intercultural aspect unless when they were presented neither inside an animal atmosphere, nor as pets in the human community. It may consolidate the concept of distance between the two cultures – languages. The cat and the bear spoke, read, participated in social activities, and lived inside the house. They both had families somewhere abroad to whom they sent letters and photos. A third grade teacher remarked that one of his students asked him “Do their cats speak English too?” This remark may reveal the fact that the students felt

• Tina from London talks about her favorite festival. “Hello, my names is Tina. I come from London. I live in Notting Hill. In the summer there is a big festival here. It’s called the Notting Hill Carnival. It’s the biggest street festival in Europe...”.

they were exposed to some strange world which they need to understand and overcome their cultural shock.

On the side of women, there was a different view presented through the language. It said indirectly that there was a big difference between the roles of women in an English-speaking society and the local Arabic society. The contradiction could arise here in the mind of the child if his own mother is a teacher or a dentist. Some vocations in which women were shown are still strange to be accepted inside the Arabic society, such as a bus driver or a motorcycle driver, but the rest are very common and popular among Jordanian women. It could have reflected a universal issue if only names or places were mentioned. Otherwise, these elements of civilized societies only pointed to English-speaking communities.

Social events and celebrations, given a good deal of interest and were not related to a certain culture, could be classified under the intercultural aspects. A word should be said in favor of the textbooks on the mentioned festivals from various parts of the world. But this series was supposed to be designed for Jordanian students, and there is a worldwide famous festival in Jordan that could have been mentioned instead of the Independence Day. All countries celebrate their independence day, but not all of them celebrate a remarkable festival like Jerash Festival, which the committee that edited the textbooks should have included.

Addressing people may cause some different feelings towards the language and its culture. The difference between Mr. Mrs. and Miss need to be cleared out, knowing that although there are synonyms in Arabic for each one of them, they might be used differently.

The social concepts and values stressed throughout the textbooks were found to be also universal and intercultural. The chosen concepts like time and punctuality, polite expressions such as "please" and "thank you", and paying attention to cleanness of the environment seem to fit perfectly in the suitable time and place of the teaching – learning process, specially when they were presented inside the community of both nationalities, not only the foreign society.

It has been noticed that the aspects of the foreign culture were almost not related to one country of the native speakers of English. It would have no trouble if the textbooks were designed to any other grade other than the beginners, but this age is critical and sensitive. The student may hate the whole concept if he faces any instability in dealing with it.

Finally, the researcher recommended that cultural contexts to be studied so that the young students can overcome the cultural shock, and shorten the distance between Arabic and English. The general goals of teaching English in Jordan are both educational and instrumental. The need to motivate learners to learn English is crucial, specially when this process is starting from grade one. This could be achieved by addressing the needs of the learners, shortening the distance

between the two cultures, and emphasizing balance between the two cultures: the Arab-Islamic culture and the foreign culture. It is rather important to highlight the local issues at the same level of the global interests, in order to bring the language closer to the real and daily life of the students.

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