

English for Specific Culture : A New Approach to EFL

Textbook Content Writing

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Introduction

Language and culture are interrelated. Language is the product of culture, and culture is a partial reflection of it. Learning an L2 (second/ foreign language) is undoubtedly enhanced by learning about the culture of the people who speak this language.

However, the teaching of a foreign language such as English has sometimes been associated with explicit or implicit assumptions about the norms and values of the native speakers' culture which may be, in many cases, in conflict with the learners' cultural values and norms (Sharifian, 1999; Alptekin, 1992; Zaid, 1999).

The spread of English in the world is viewed by many people as an act of new colonialism or 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson 1992). Even opponents of the concept of 'linguistic imperialism' such as Kramsch (1993:12) agree that L2 instructors who teach English to non-native speakers tend "to transmit with the language a view of the world that reflects only their own values and cultural assumptions." On the other hand, when English textbooks are written by L1 instructors, the local culture is often exaggerated, and this usually results in a culture gap which may hinder the learning and understanding of English (Prodromou, 1988; Kramsch, 1993; Majdzadeh, 2002).

Another criticism about teaching English to speakers of other languages is related to the methods of teaching usually recommended by native speakers who often draw universal conclusions about teaching and learning a language from studies conducted mainly in the United States and Europe (Jarvis et. al., 1998: 74). This criticism is expressed in a number of educationalists and psychologists 'works, mainly in South East Asia, who argue that different cultures have also different learning styles (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Jarvis et. al., 1998; Minami, 2002; McKay, 2002). These scholars also believe that the assessment of English, which can be appropriate to and valid for one culture, may not necessarily be so for another culture (Biggs, 1996; Jarvis et. al., 1998; Lantaigne, 2004).

The theories of Second Language Acquisition have proved that the process of acquiring a L2 is much affected by how learners acquire their native language and the nature of this language, as learners usually compare the new language with their own. (Fries, 1947; Lado, 1957; McDonough, 1981; Littlewood, 1984). In fact, the theory of *Contrastive Analysis* gives clear explanations of the important relation between English and the learners' native language, which implies that the language content of a textbook must reflect the problematic areas of language that the students of a specific culture might encounter because of their mother tongue. For example, the content written for a Japanese learner, must be different from the one provided for an Arab or a Russian learner of English.

This study suggests a broader view of culture which puts forward a new model for teaching aspects of language and culture with EFL textbooks. It is based on the content analysis of two English textbooks (a national and an international one) , both used in Jordan to teach English at secondary school level. *Amra General English One* is a local English textbook used to teach Grade 11 pupils of Jordanian public schools ,and *Headway Advanced* is an international English language textbook used to teach English in some private secondary schools in Jordan.

These two textbooks might not be used in Jordan at the moment; however, they were selected for this study on purpose as they represent two different approaches to textbook writing as far as cultural content is concerned.

This study suggests a new comprehensive view of culture for non-western learners of English and takes into consideration the specificities of different cultures. It raises important questions about the content of current textbooks and the validity of teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching that is still in use in many countries all over the world..

The research addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent does *Amra General English One* fulfill the requirements of English for Specific Culture?

2. To what extent does *Headway Advanced* textbook fulfill the requirements of English for Specific Culture?

1. Definition of English for Specific Culture (ESC)

- English for Specific Culture (ESC) is defined as English for learners of different cultures with more consideration for the specificities of each culture such as the values, attitudes, beliefs in addition to the learners' learning styles and how their mother tongue affects their acquisition of L2. The figure below shows the components of ESC.

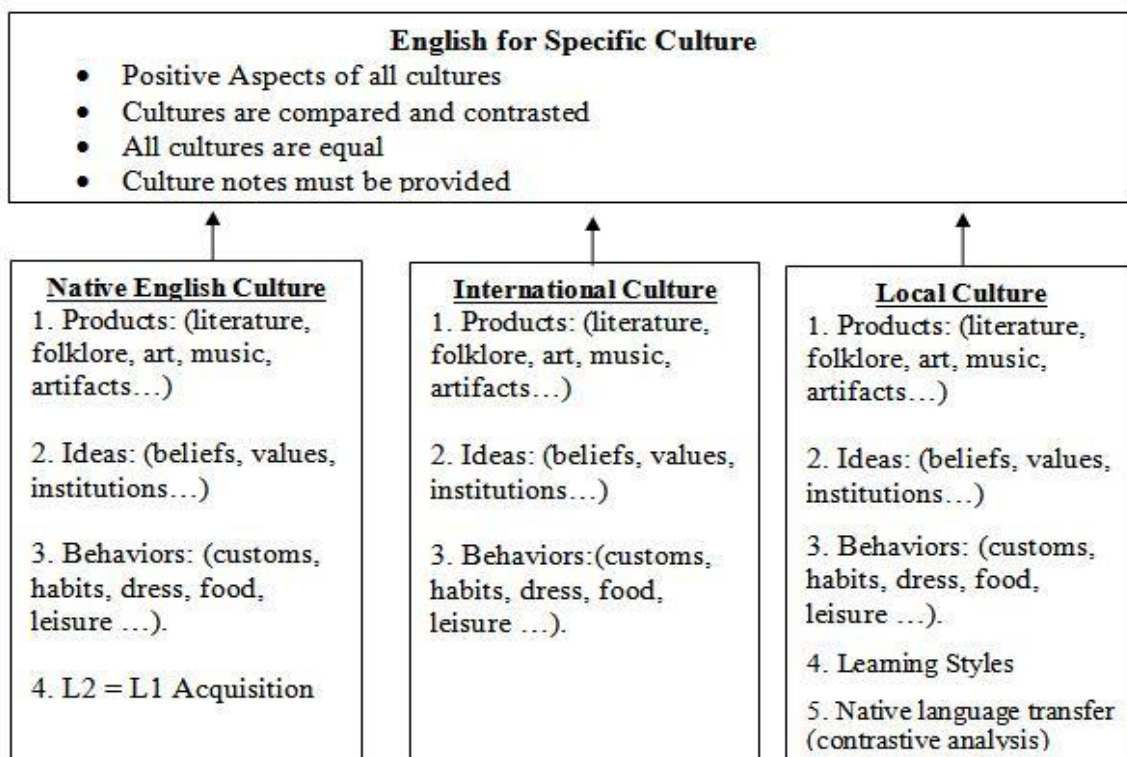
- *The term "Culture"* as defined by Tomalin and Stemplesky (1993), refers to products, ideas, and behaviors. Culture is classified into three categories, namely '*native English culture*', '*international culture*', and '*local culture*'.

- *Specific Culture's Learning Style* refers to the psychological and developmental characteristics that make the same teaching method more suitable and more successful for a certain group of people than others.

- '*Native English Culture*' refers to the culture of countries where English is the native language, mainly the United States and United Kingdom.

- '*International Culture*' refers to the culture of countries where English is used as a second or a foreign language such as France, Germany, Japan or China.

- '*Local Culture*' refers to Jordanian culture or the culture of Arab countries.



2. Cultural Content in L2 Textbooks

The cultural content of L2 textbooks has been the subject of many debates all over the world. One such debate was whether foreign language content should be value-free or independent of cultural background, as Brown (1993) argued. Kramsch (1993) and Byram (1989) maintained that it is impossible to teach language without teaching culture and many educationalists posed questions like: Should the cultural content of English teaching address L1 or L2 culture? What role does culture play in second or foreign language teaching?

Adaskou et. al. (1990) in a study of Moroccan learners argued that the inclusion of target culture information may be quite motivating to their students, but they noted that many teachers objected to certain patterns of British and American behaviors which they found inappropriate to include in the Moroccan English curriculum.

Kramsch (1988) remarked that most English textbooks in Germany are based on the assumption that both German and American cultures are similar. Yet, the German culture sometimes appears slightly 'inferior' to the American culture. She showed that some grammar exercises reinforce the values and ideals of the Americans not the Germans.

Barakat (cited in Zughoul, 1999) analyzed the Jordanian Petra Series textbooks for their cultural bias and found that western characters are positively viewed and better addressed than Arab characters who are negatively viewed and, in many cases, made inferior to western characters. Barakat also found that Arabic names are few while British ones represented in a larger number.

Ismael (1992) compared English textbooks at the secondary level, both in Jordan and Occupied Palestine, and noticed that most of the values included in the Palestinian textbooks are

negative when compared to those in the Jordanian textbooks and to those used to teach the Israeli students. He commented that many of those Palestinian values are intentionally made negative by the textbook designers who express the views of the occupier of the land and therefore have a hidden curriculum to transmit..

3. Specific Cultures' Learning Styles

As culture and language are interrelated, researchers raised questions about how language teaching pedagogy can be affected by cultural differences (Stapleton, 2000). One main criticism was made about some studies in Developmental Psychology. Many such studies are made in the west, and thus, draw universal conclusions about how people learn ,regardless of their cultural differences. Today, scholars believe that different cultures use different learning styles (Oxford and Anderson, 1995; Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Jarvis et. al., 1998; Minami, 2002; McKay, 2002).

Cortazzi and Jin (1996), for example, claimed that Chinese learners are socialized into a 'culture of learning' that strongly emphasizes memory, imitation and repetition. They reported that Chinese learners view certain aspects of students' behaviors in a way which is in contrast with how their western teachers perceive them. They also mentioned that Chinese learners consider volunteering in the class as showing off, and group interaction as a fruitless activity that has to be replaced by the teacher himself..

Gobel (2002) stated that Japanese learners are reluctant to work in groups, to solve communication problems, or to be involved in communication with their peers. Japanese learners feel that listening to the teacher speaking and interacting with him can be more beneficial than interacting with their peers. Gobel also explained that solving communication problems in Japanese, rather than in English, is preferred by the majority of students. English classes in Japan are teacher-centered, and the Grammar-Translation Method seems to still be used in many parts of the country (LoCastro, cited in McKay, 2003).

In the same line of thought, Vasquez (1990) stated that Hispanic children learn better in a cooperative environment, probably because of the extended family systems that many Hispanic students live with.

4. Language Acquisition, Language Transfer and Culture

Language acquisition is yet another field of study which has proved to be greatly affected by culture. Buttjes (1990:55) suggested five reasons to explain the inseparable connection between language and culture:

1. language acquisition does not follow a universal sequence, but differs across cultures;
2. the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized through exchanges of language in particular social situations;
3. every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects the form, function and content of children's utterances;
4. caregivers' primary concern is not with grammatical input, but with the transmission of sociocultural knowledge;
5. the native learner acquires, in addition to language, the paralinguistic patterns and the kinetics of his or her culture.

In addition, the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* claims that learners acquire other languages by comparing and contrasting them with their mother tongue. Contrastivists argue that most of the errors produced by learners are the result of *L1* transfer. Ellis(1997.52) reported

that about five percent of the language errors produced by Spanish learners of English are the result of language transfer . Adherents of this view believe that language transfer can sometimes facilitate *L2* acquisition when the two languages are similar. Thus, French learners of English are less exposed to errors such as : "The man whom I met *him is a doctor ", while Arab learners of English are more likely to make such error.

Therefore, the degree of difficulty of learning some *L2* elements is determined by whether these elements are similar to the learners' native language or not (Lado, 1957). Lado explained that people can predict language errors and consequently decide which items of language should be given special attention or, maybe, taught in a particular way such as using intensive techniques . Many errors have been observed and discussed by researchers all over the world such as Littlewood, 1984; Nunan,(cited in Nunan & Crater, 2001); Ellis, 1997; Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000; Ekiert, 2003; and Bataineh, 2005.

From this review of the related literature, we may draw the following assumptions:

- Culture and language are interrelated: by teaching language we are necessarily teaching culture. However, the main debate is about what cultural content should be taught and how it should be taught.
- English textbook writers are often accused of being biased to their own culture as they, consciously or unconsciously, present a view of the world that represents western culture, and not that of the learners.
- Different cultures have different learning styles; therefore, the teaching methods must be adapted accordingly.
- Second language acquisition is affected by how people acquire their native language and the nature of this language.

5. Findings

This section examines the results of the content analysis of the two textbooks and tries to answer the questions stated above.study in relation to the two research questions stated in the Introduction :

RQ1: To what extent does Amra GE textbook fulfill the requirements of ESC?

The results of the content analysis have shown that of all the items that have cultural content in Amra G.E 1, 82 items represent native English culture, 103 items represent international culture, and 148 items represent local culture that is 24.6%, 30.9% and 44.4%, respectively. The culture that is most represented in *Amra G.E 1* is therefore the local culture, with less focus on international culture and even less on native English culture (Table 1 below).

Table (1):Frequencies and Percentages of the Cultural Content in Amra G.E 1

Textbooks	Frequencies			Total
	Native English Culture	International Culture	Local Culture	
Amra General English (SB)	43	50	100	193
Amra General English (WB)	39	53	48	140
Total	82	103	148	333
Percentage	24.6%	30.9%	44.4%	100%

A study of the frequencies of words that represent certain cultural aspects in *Amra G.E 1* has also shown that the local culture is more emphasized by using local Jordanian or Arabic settings and places, names of people, and names of local organizations. Thus, out of 45 names of people mentioned in *Amra G.E 1*, only 22 represent local Jordanian or Arabic culture. We also note names of politicians such as King Abdullah, and King Hussein, or literary figures such as At-Tayeb Saleh and Arar. However, very few Arab names were used in the exercises given in the Workbook and the Student's Book (Ali, Yusuf, Salma and Rana in only five sentences).

The names and titles of people that represent international culture are 9, and the people that represent native English culture are 14 appear in very few contexts.

The number of places mentioned in *Amra G.E 1* is 94. Out of these, 51 places represent local Jordanian or Arabic culture, 30 places represent international cultures, and only 14 places represent native English culture which is the least represented in the book. The words that represent beliefs are very few. Only three words have been noted: *Al Aqsa*, *Old Testament* and *mosque*. These words can be classified as international symbols, though *Al Aqsa* can be termed more as a local symbol since it is geographically located in an Arab country.

The number of Organizations used in *Amra G.E 1* is 34. Of this number 12 organizations represented local culture, 19 represent international culture and only 3 organizations represent native English culture which is again the least represented in these textbooks. It is quite clear that the International culture was the most represented due to the overuse of names of the *United Nations Organization*

Out of 21 journals mentioned in the books only 5 represent local culture and international culture, with the biggest weight given to the native English culture this time, whereas the money that is mentioned in *Amra G.E 1* represents the three cultures. It is mainly the Jordanian *Dinar*, the *Franc*, the *Yen* and the *Mark*, the *Dollar* and the *British Pound*(see table 2 below).

Table (2):Frequencies of words that represent cultural Aspects in Amra G.E 1

No	Cultural Symbols	Frequencies			Total
		Native English Culture	International Culture	Local Culture	
1	People	14	9	22	45
2	Places	13	30	51	94
3	Beliefs	1	2	1	4
4	Organizations	3	19	12	34
5	Publications	9	7	5	21
6	Money & Products	2	3	1	6
Total		42	70	92	204
Percentage		20.6%	34.3%	45.1%	100%

Table (2) shows clearly that the local culture is most focused with a percentage of 45.1%. International culture is second with a percentage of 34.3%, and the least represented culture is the native English culture, 20.6%.

Regarding the learning styles addressed, the General Guidelines of the English Curriculum for the secondary level recommend using an *eclectic approach* which is a mixture of

different approaches to language teaching and takes account of "the learner, the stated aims and objectives of teaching English, the complexities of language learning, and the constraints imposed by the educational setting." (MOE, 1993, p. 16)

Amra G.E I has also some communicative aspects through the use of authentic materials that provide real life situations where learners can communicate freely in spoken or written language. However, the language input and communicative activities are very limited in the book, and so many students who prefer interaction with their peers may not have such a chance of interaction. *Amra G.E I* also uses a deductive approach in the presentation of grammar and writing tasks; the grammar rules are presented through examples and then practiced. The grammar box in every unit is a good example of this approach. The writing process is also introduced and explained to students first and practiced in relevant situations. This approach is used in *Amra G.E I* to "supplement the inductive approach which students have been used to in the previous stage." (MOE, 1993, p. 17). Problem solving and critical thinking are emphasized by providing tasks and activities that help students develop independent learning. (MOE, 1993). However, these suggestions were based on the findings of western Developmental Psychology, regardless of the preferable learning styles of non-western learners.

Language mistakes, on the other hand, are positively viewed in *Amra G.E I*, that is, as a transitional stage in the process of learning a foreign language. However, the textbook and guidelines do not specify the kind of mistakes that are expected from an Arab learner and do not suggest special activities for dealing with mistakes resulting from Arabic language interference as purported by the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis*. When tenses or modal auxiliaries are taught, there is no special reference to the Arab learner's background language and culture or to his potential learning problems. In any case, the language input does not address the Arab learner, nor do the language activities.

RQ2: To what extent does 'Headway Advanced' textbook fulfill the requirement of ESC?

The number of items that have cultural content in Headway Advanced is 884. Out of this number 736 items represent native English culture, 147 items represent international Culture, and only two items represent local Jordanian or Arab culture, that is, 83.3%, 16.6% and 0.1%, respectively. These figures clearly show that the culture that is most represented in Headway Advanced is native English culture with less focus on international culture, and very little to no weight to local Jordanian or Arab culture. Table (3) illustrates the frequency and percentage of this content.

Table (3): Frequency and Percentage of the Cultural Content of Headway Advanced

Textbooks	Frequencies			Total
	Native English Culture	International Culture	Local Culture	
Headway Advanced (SB)	513	91	2	606
Headway Advanced (WB)	223	55	0	278
Total	736	146	2	884
Percentage	83.3%	16.6%	0.1%	100%

A close study of the frequency of words that represent certain cultural aspects in *Headway Advanced* also shows that native English culture is present mainly through British and American settings. This is clear in the use of British or American places, English names of people and, to some extent, names of British or American organizations. Thus, out of 258 names of people mentioned in *Headway Advanced* 234 names represent native English culture. Most of these are names of literary figures such as *Graham Green*, *George Bernard Shaw*, *Agatha Christie*, *Oscar Wilde* and *William Congreve*, or characters of famous literary works such as *Hamlet*, *Dorian Gray*, *Alice*, *Mrs. Ferras* or *Mrs. Leaf*. Names of ordinary people are often used in the grammar exercises throughout the book. Most of them are common English names like *John*, *Peter*, *Paul*, *Alan*, *Lisa*, *Jane* and *Anne*. However, few names of people from other cultures are used and less frequently, if compared to English names. Only 23 names of people from Jordan or Arab countries and only one name is used frequently: *Muhammad*.

The number of places mentioned in *Headway Advanced* is 131. Out of these ,68 places represent native English culture, 62 places ,international cultures, and only one place represents local Jordanian or Arabic culture.

The number of words that represent beliefs in *Headway Advanced* is 19. Only one word represents native English culture and 18 words international culture. In fact, one full unit in *Headway Advanced* refers to different religions in the world: *Islam*, *Christianity*, *Judaism* *Buddhism*, and *Hinduism*. The local Jordanian or Arab culture is not obvious, and words '*Mohammad*' and '*Allah*' seem to be viewed as symbols of Jordanian or Arab culture .

As for organizations, *Headway Advanced* uses 32 different names. 24 represent native English culture, 8 represent international culture and no organization for local Jordanian or Arab culture. It is quite clear that native English culture is the most represented in the book through examples like *Sandhurst Academy*, *Scotland Yard*, *the British Council*, *Harrow school*, *Summerhill School*, *London Electricity* and names of famous British Universities such as *Oxford University* and *Cambridge University*.

The biggest share of the 44publications mentioned in *Headway Advanced* is given to native English culture with 42 English or American publications mentioned in the textbook. International culture is second with a very small share consisting of only 2 publications and no publication for local Jordanian or Arab culture. The most common publications are newspapers and magazines such as *the Independent*, *the Times*, *New York Times*, and names of famous English literary works such as *Pygmalion*, *Snow White* and *Quite American*.

The money used in *Headway Advanced* is largely the *Pound* and the *Dollar* which represent native English culture. The international products mentioned are BMW, Volvo and Martini. The local Jordanian or Arab money or products are never mentioned in either the Student's Book or Work Book. A summary of the frequency of occurrence of the words reflecting cultural content in *Headway Advanced* are illustrated in Table (4) below.

Table (4):Frequency of Words that Represent Cultural Aspects in *Headway Advanced*

No	Cultural Symbols	Frequencies			Total
		Native English Culture	International Culture	Local Culture	
1	People	234	23	1	258
2	Places	68	62	1	131
3	Beliefs	1	18	0	19
4	Organizations	24	8	0	32
5	Publications	42	2	0	44
6	Money & Products	2	4	0	6
	Total	371	117	2	490
	Percentage	75.7%	23.9%	0.4%	100%

The methodology recommended in *Headway Advanced*, for all types of activities is Communicative Language Teaching. Most of the tasks in the book represent authentic situations and contain little or no explanation of the rules. The learners are required to practice the main language structures and functions intensively, and so internalize the rules. Both *Headway Advanced Student's Book* and *Work Book* provide the learners with a large number of exercises to achieve this purpose. The book is also rich in dialogues that give learners opportunities to listen to authentic language and practice it in speaking. For writing the learners are provided with pictures, charts or tables . However, at the end of the book there is a grammar section with an explanation of the rules if needed. Thus, the authors of the textbook achieved a good balance of activities for learners with different learning styles .

The language focus in *Headway Advanced* is mainly on problematic areas of language that native learners might encounter. Thus, the authors presented mainly an *L2 equals L1* acquisition view of learning which assumes that EFL learners might make the same mistakes that a child usually makes when he (she) learns his (her) mother tongue. There is evidence that the language problems of Arab learners or those of other cultures are considered to be the same, such as the use of words like *last* and *lastly*, *hard* and *hardly*, *lay*, *lie* and *lie* , the use of the verb *become* , the relative clause, the object etc

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest a broader view of culture which takes into consideration variables such as the learning styles of different cultures, and theories of language acquisition and developmental psychology, the effect of *L1* on learning English as L2. This approach rejects the domination of a certain culture and recommends a wider context in which English is used as an international language(Cortazzi and Jin,(cited in McKay, 2002, p. 88), McKay, (2002); McKay, (2003), and Da Cruz, 2010). This approach encourages 'the judicious blend' of cultures which was suggested by Zughoul (1999).

Although the study does not recommend any style of learning as best or preferable for Arab learners, it draws attention to the fact that different cultures might have different learning styles. This suggestion is supported by many studies in the field(Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Jarvis et. al., 1998; Minami, 2002; McKay, 2002; and Abbot, 2004).

The nature of the learners' native language is, yet, another aspect that is emphasized in this model. A close study of the common language problems likely to occur with the use of the two textbooks gives us a clear idea of the gap between the potential and actual language problems of the learners. The grammar and structures in these books are supposed to reflect what Jordanian or Arab learners need to concentrate on because of L1 transfer from Arabic to English. This view is also supported by many linguists such as Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957; Littlewood, 1984; Widdowson, 1990; Alptekin, 1992; Nunan, (2001) who suggested that textbook writing must be based on the scientific study of the similarities and differences of the learner's native language.

Each textbook represents a different view of culture in ELT. *Amra G.E 1*, presents mainly local Jordanian and Arabic culture by providing local settings and themes. This is exaggerated sometimes as Arabic texts are used in many places of the book. The Native English culture and international culture are often minimized, and the cultural content of the book is neutral or positive. However, there are a few examples where other cultures are negatively viewed in the book. One of these appeared in Unit (3) "*Does the Sun Go Round the Earth*" where many people in the United Kingdom appeared to be ignorant about simple scientific facts such as those related to basic astronomy, evolution, chemistry, and biology. At the end of the text, the authors claimed that "the Danes, Spaniards, Germans and Dutch knew better." (Phillips et. al., 1996, P. 19). The international culture appeared only through over repetition of names of United Nations Organizations, with very little information about other cultures of the world.

Although the local culture is emphasized in *Amra G.E 1*, there are still very few examples where it is compared and contrasted with other cultures. One good example is in Unit (12) where the government of Jordan is compared with the government of the United Kingdom.

In *Headway Advanced*, the situation is opposite. To a great extent, both the student's book and the work book overemphasize a purely British English culture. Cultures of other native English speaking countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are absent in most of the Units. American culture, which is more focused than the rest, appears only in a few examples in the book.

The themes discussed in *Headway Advanced* are mainly topics of general interest such as language, literature, war and peace, social life, science, religion, art and fashion which also present native English culture. This view of culture in *Headway Advanced* is evident through names of English characters, publications, organizations and products including money.

Other cultures are not emphasized in the book, and no negative aspect has been noticed. Some values presented are in contrast with the norms and standards of the local culture such as talking about wine positively (in many places in the book), and showing pictures of gays and describing them as "normal people"

Headway Advanced mainly represents native English culture. However, it sometimes compares this culture to other cultures. For example, in Unit (5) "War and Peace" where many extracts about war taken from different cultures were mentioned. In Unit (12) "*the Meaning of Life*" different religions are compared and contrasted in one lesson. Yet, some of the information mentioned about Islam and describing Koran as 'religious literature' gives a clear idea of deep misconceptions of the Islamic culture.

Like *Amra G.E 1*, *Headway Advanced* gives very little or no attention to the other aspects of culture such as those related to learning styles of other cultures and similarities and differences of other languages from English. In fact most of the language manipulated in the

book represented a native view of language learning which supports the theory of *L2 equals L1 acquisition* .

This is due to the fact that these textbooks are written by people from different cultures who present a view of the world of their own culture. This view is similar to the one discussed by researchers such as Prodromou, 1988; Kramsch, 1988; Alptekin, 1992; Kramsch, 1993) who explain how cultural content in an English curriculum usually represents the views of the people writing it, which might not be positive all the time.

This study suggests a number of principles derived from this cultural model as basic requirements for textbook design. These principles are:

1. English textbooks should include a balanced, judicious blend of the various cultures because learners are expected to use English in a variety of contexts with native and non-native speakers of the language who belong to different cultures.

2. The cultural content of language textbooks *must not* include any content which might be culturally offensive or irritating to the people learning with these materials.

3. The cultural content should focus on the bright and positive aspects of the different cultures.

4. Cultures represented must be compared and contrasted with the *L1* culture in order to increase understanding of the different cultures.

5. Whenever any cultural reference is used, it must be clear to both users, i.e. the learners and the non-native teachers of English .

6. Textbooks must pay greater attention to the problematic areas of language which often result from mother tongue interference.

7. The methodology used in the textbooks must be based on a scientific study of the preferred learning styles of the learners in relation to their culture.

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