

## Cultural Aspects in English for Iraq, Book 6

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate cultural aspects in English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary. For this purpose, a nine-cultural aspect checklist has been developed to survey and analyze the content of the Pupil's Book and Activity Book of English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary. The cultural aspects include names of characters, titles (terms of addressing people), man's jobs, woman's jobs, pictures, food, celebrations, geography and currency. After analyzing the Pupil's Book and Activity Book of English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary, the results reveal that there is inadequate cultural content; the Arabic culture is dominating over the foreign culture; furthermore, the foreign culture tends to be international.

**Keywords:** cultural aspect, Arabic culture, foreign culture, English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary

### 1. Introduction

English is taught as a foreign language (henceforth, FL) in Iraq. Before 2003, teaching English as a foreign language (henceforth, EFL) started from the fifth grade at primary schools, but after the collapse of the former regime in 2003, EFL has been taught from the primary first grade. The change of the regime has brought up new educational philosophy. This philosophy has to cope with the new democratic regime, the openness to the global world and the new revolution of information technology.

The current curriculum is called *English for Iraq* series. It is a replacement of *Iraq Opportunities* series that was developed after 2003. This new curriculum covers twelfth grades: six primary grades, three intermediate grades and three secondary grades. It aims to stimulate Iraqi EFL learners to practice English using authentic materials developed from audible and visual materials, newspapers, magazines, reports with graphs and tables, websites, e-mails, guide leaflets and commercials.

Until recently, studies in EFL have concentrated typically on the linguistic analysis levels, exploring how learners come to learn the form of the language. Nowadays, more attention has been being paid to the cultural aspects of the target language, with the recognition that language, as an essential vehicle of human communication, is extremely cultural. EFL has its own culture. To learn the language successfully, it is significant to understand the culture. Newmark (1988: 94) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". Sun (2013:371) states that language is the main method for

culture to demonstrate its norms, beliefs and values. Correspondingly, culture influences language – the relation between culture and language is just of that type of relation between a tree and its roots.

Teaching and learning EFL or any other language comprise numerous significant elements. Textbook, perhaps, is the most important core component. Hutchinson and Torres (1994 :315) assert that in any English language teaching-learning situation, the textbook is a universal component. It seems that no teaching-learning situation can be considered complete until it has its compatible textbook. EFL textbook carries language and its culture. Thus, such outstanding status stresses the importance of evaluating the EFL textbook by supervisors, teachers, learners and decision makers.

This study aims to survey the Arabic<sup>1</sup> and foreign cultural aspects and compare their representation in *English for Iraq, Book 6* (6<sup>th</sup> primary).

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies have confirmed the essential function of culture in learning the FL (Gao, 2006; Tomalin, 2008; Abdullah, 2010, Risager, 2012 and Galeano, 2014). Teaching culture for learners is very important to achieve a successful learning of the FL. The learners need to learn about both the foreign culture and their native culture in order to communicate effectively, and this cannot be achieved without understanding the foreign culture. Kramsch (2004:249) states that teaching of any language requires focus on both teaching linguistic content and teaching meaning and teaching the culture of a language is the best way to teach its meaning. Language can only create and interpret meaning within the cultural context where it exists. Oetzel and Ting-Toomy (2001:106) state that when two cultures come into contact with each other, cultural differences may lead to possible conflict in communication. Dweik (2000) adds that differences can be caused by many culture-linked factors such as age, gender, race, social status, generation, life knowledge, and talk styles. Seelye (1993:45) argues that such factors influence people's behaviour and the way they speak. Hence, with the above-mentioned cultural differences, communication could not be smoothly fulfilled. Thus, it is necessary to integrate culture in language learning. Lund (2014:177) mentions the rationale behind incorporating and emphasizing culture in language learning as follows: first, learning about the context of target language and its speakers may motivate the learners; second, cultural knowledge helps the learners develop communicative competence in the target language; third, learning about the FL culture enhances the cognitive development and general knowledge level of the learners; fourth, learning about the FL culture helps

the learners develop intercultural competence as knowing about other cultures as well as their own will help communication with people from various cultural backgrounds.

Textbooks often play a fundamental role in the formal instruction of FL, particularly at primary school levels. Sheldon (1988:237) asserts that "textbooks are considered the visible heart of any ELT programme". Nowadays, much language instruction is planned by printed textbooks, even if it is accompanied with other resources from the Internet or other sources (Risager and Chapelle, 2013:1620). Further, textbooks introduce mostly the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs inside classroom (Liu, 2013: 83). Moreover, Grainger (2001:8) considers textbooks as "the window through which students come to know the language they learn and the wider context this language is used in". FL textbooks are developed to provide a knowledge of the FL people's language and culture. Language syllabi are typically structured so that learners are presented with linguistic knowledge (e.g., morphology, vocabulary, grammatical structures) and speech acts (e.g., request, greeting, complaint, refusal, invitation, compliment) in a prearranged manner. Different aspects of language are often contextualized socially such as a family visit, a mall shopping, or a vacation. Culture is sometimes outlined in contexts exemplifying what and how the FL people eat, dress, work, play, and live their daily lives. Sometimes, examples of typical behaviors are included to show the way some people of the target culture complain, console each other, celebrate joyful events, and solve real-life problems (Schissler, 1990:81).

The educational sociologist, Apple (1981), has asserted the significance of the role the classroom textbook plays as the dominant source of content as subject matter. This significance has led to remarkable scholarly attention paid to the FL textbook description and evaluation.

Daoud & Celce-Murica (1979) suggested three-step technique for the evaluation of the FL textbook; survey, analysis and judgment. The first step requires skimming through the introduction, the table of contents, glossary or index to obtain an idea about the purpose, organization, method of presentation in addition to the kind and range of materials that the textbook includes. The second step involves careful examination of the content of the textbook. The textbook should be investigated in terms of topics, contexts, vocabulary, structures, exercises, illustrations, physical make-up which includes cover, size, binding, paper, printing, type, and layout of the page. The third step ends by evaluating the textbook by the above-mentioned criteria. However, they ignored the cultural dimension that will be highlighted in the present study.

Sheldon (1988) suggests a seventeen- item checklist for an EFL textbook evaluation. The checklist includes rationale, availability, layout/graphics, physical characteristics, user, user-friendliness, linkage, selection/grading, appropriateness, authenticity, adequacy, cultural preference, educational validity, stimulus/practice/revision, flexibility, guidance and overall value for money.

Moreover, Ramirez and Hall (1990) has developed a three-perspective checklist to evaluate Spanish textbooks used in USA. The checklist covers sociocultural, socio-linguistic and curricular design perspectives.

Wong (2009) has developed a fifty-items checklist for evaluating the FL textbook. The first 17 items cover the linguistic content. The second 16 items cover cultural and real-world content such as the background, culture and environment of the FL learner. The third 5 items cover learners' concerns. The fourth 7 items cover teachers' concerns. The fifth 5 items cover the physical make-up and affordability.

As culture and language cannot be separated, Skopinskaja (2003:39) argues that teaching language just as an abstract system doesn't help the learners use language in the real world. Therefore, school textbooks should include aspects of culture. Tang (1999) endorses the notion of that culture and language are interrelated. She suggests that a learner can only speak a language well if he/she can think in that language. Moreover, she emphasizes that "language is the soul of the country and people who speak it". That undoubtedly suggests the inseparable link between language and culture and the need to combine them in the EFL textbooks. Thus, in FL teaching, textbooks have become carriers of cultural information. This implies that it would be downright risky to consider any textbook without taking learners' society and culture into consideration. In order to do so, an analysis of the content of textbooks should be carried out. Consequently, the inevitable incorporation of culture in EFL textbooks has led to a demanding trend to evaluate EFL textbooks in terms of cultural aspects.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) developed general rules to analyze the cultural content of EFL textbooks. These rules provide a representation of source culture (learner's native culture), target culture where English is spoken as a first language and international cultures where there is a combination of English and non-English speaking countries.

Aliakbari (2004) used the content analysis approach to investigate culture in high school ELT textbooks taught in Iran. The results reveal that the occurrence of cultural aspects is superficial and impedes learners from gaining cultural knowledge. Therefore, the EFL textbooks lack the sufficient cultural content that is necessary to develop intercultural communication.

Autoom (2005) explored the cultural dimension in Action Pack textbooks taught for the first six grades in Jordanian primary schools. The findings show that the western cultural aspects predominate these textbooks in a way contrasts Islamic culture, for example women are portrayed as liberal and independent. Besides, the textbooks are almost culturally-loaded.

Al-Hishoush (2006) investigated national and international EFL textbooks taught in Jordan. The researcher used the content analysis for the two books as a tool of collecting data. The results reveal that in national EFL textbooks there is more emphasis on local Jordanian and Arabic culture compared to international culture.

Lee (2009) investigated the aspects of culture learning and teaching that are encompassed in eleven EFL textbooks of conversation used in Korean schools. The results indicate that the majority of these textbooks tends very much to include the aspects of learning USA culture such as facts and figures about history, arts and customs.

Cakir (2010) investigated the frequency of specific cultural features and phrases in EFL textbooks used in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades of Turkish primary schools. The results indicate that the EFL textbooks do not supply learners with adequate specific cultural features and expressions. Therefore, these textbooks do not help learners to be exposed to authentic EFL situations.

Chao (2011) employed the content analysis method to examine the cultural content and its hidden curriculum of *New American Inside Out* (published by Macmillan in 2008) used in Taiwanese primary level school. The results of analyzing this EFL textbook show clearly that it promotes various cultural dimensions. In addition, the target culture is dominating over the source and international cultures.

Mahmood, Asghar and Hussain (2012) investigated the cultural representation in EFL textbook taught for the 6<sup>th</sup> Class at Pakistan Beacon House School System. Results prove that EFL textbook does not provide enough information about the target culture. It also reveals that the textbook concentrates on the non-native culture. Moreover, results reveal that there is inadequate intercultural balance in this textbook; and the Pakistani culture is given less attention, which is probably to distract the learners from their own culture. Additionally, results show that Step Ahead level “1” represents the Singaporean culture.

Al-Akraa (2013) assessed the content of *Iraq Opportunities 3*, which is taught for the 5<sup>th</sup> primary grade. The evaluation has included areas of grammar, vocabulary, and culture. Al-Akraa used a teachers' questionnaire and an evaluation checklist. The findings show clearly that culture has a minor role and a low representation in *Iraq Opportunities 3*.

Liu (2013) explored the types of culture introduced in Chinese university EFL textbooks. The results reveal that more than 50% of the cultural content cannot be identified. In addition, the target cultural content dominates over international culture and source cultural which have the least attention.

Alshammari (2015) investigated the English textbooks used in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (henceforth, KSA). Findings reveal the predomination of Western culture in the Saudi English courses which are based completely on US textbooks. The courses pay no attention to Arabic and Islamic culture, and sharply alienate Saudi EFL learners from their own culture.

Al-Obaidi (2015) investigated the cultural aspects in the EFL textbooks for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> secondary grades. The results reveal insufficient cultural content for the Arabic culture and that the English culture is dominating. Moreover, EFL teachers asserted that it is difficult to deliver the cultural content to the students because it is higher than their level.

Shreeb (2017) analyzed the cultural content of EFL textbooks taught to Iraqi EFL learners in the 6<sup>th</sup> secondary grade. Results reveal that the most dominant type of culture is culture free reference. Results also show that the textbooks do not pay enough attention to the target language culture.

No recent study has investigated the cultural aspects embedded in the English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary. The present study attempts to fill this gap.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Materials**

The focus of the study is English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary. The components are Pupil's Book, Activity Book, Teacher's Book, the Audio and the Posters. However, the current study will be limited to the Pupil's Book and Activity Book (henceforth, PAB 6). They are the main components. The other components deal with the adopted methodology of teaching and recordings of all the conversations, rhymes, stories and songs in PAB 6. The Pupil's Book has eight units, comprising 56 lessons. Unit 4 and Unit 8 are revision units with four lessons each. Every unit has a magazine or a story, or both. Activity Book has the same number of units and lessons. It provides activities and exercises to enable pupils to practice and enhance what they studied and learnt from Pupil's Book.

English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary is published by Garnet Publishing Ltd, UK. The author of this work is Sarah MacBurnie. A five-woman ministerial committee appointed by the Ministry of Education has edited and adapted the work.

#### **3.2. Instrument**

In order to gather data from the PAB 6, the researcher has developed a checklist based on checklists already developed by (Newmark, 1988; Ramirez and Hall, 1990; Corrtazi and Jin, 1999; Al-Obaidi, 2015). The researcher has edited and adapted the checklist to survey and suit the cultural aspects existed in the PAB 6.

The checklist form includes the following elements as indicators of cultural aspects: characters' names, titles, man's jobs, woman's jobs, pictures, food, geography and currency. The cultural aspects are divided into Arabic and foreign cultural aspects. (See Appendix A).

The check has been validated by a jury of five EFL experts from University of Misan and Misan Education Directorate (see Appendix B). The inter-rater reliability of the checklist has been 0.91.

#### **3.3. Coding Scheme**

Gibbs (2007) defines coding as how you describe what the data you are studying are about. Coding is a procedure of identifying a word, phrase, a sentence or a picture in a text, searching and identifying concepts and figuring out the links between them. In this study, a code can be a word, a phrase or a picture that may represent a cultural aspect embedded in the PAB6.

### 3.4. Procedure

The researcher has adopted a thematic analysis to survey the cultural aspects in the PAB 6. The thematic analysis typically means that culture is regarded as a large number of topics. Risager (2014:80) states that aim of the thematic analysis is “create an overview of the image [of] a textbook...”. The subjects or themes in the textbooks will be divided into categories: names of characters, titles (terms of addressing people), celebrations, woman’s jobs and man’s jobs, pictures, food, geography and currency. Moreover, the analysis will include only the items which have clear reference to Arabic culture and foreign culture.

Each item has been counted only once according to the occurrence in the PAB 6 regardless of the frequency of the appearance in the PAB 6. The cultural aspects in the PAB 6 have been specified according to the definitions of aspects for this study and categorized into two groups: Arabic and foreign. The data have been analyzed using percentages of the occurrences of the aspects in the PAB 6. In order to achieve the second aim of the study, a comparison has been carried out between the percentages of the aspects of the Arabic and foreign cultural aspects.

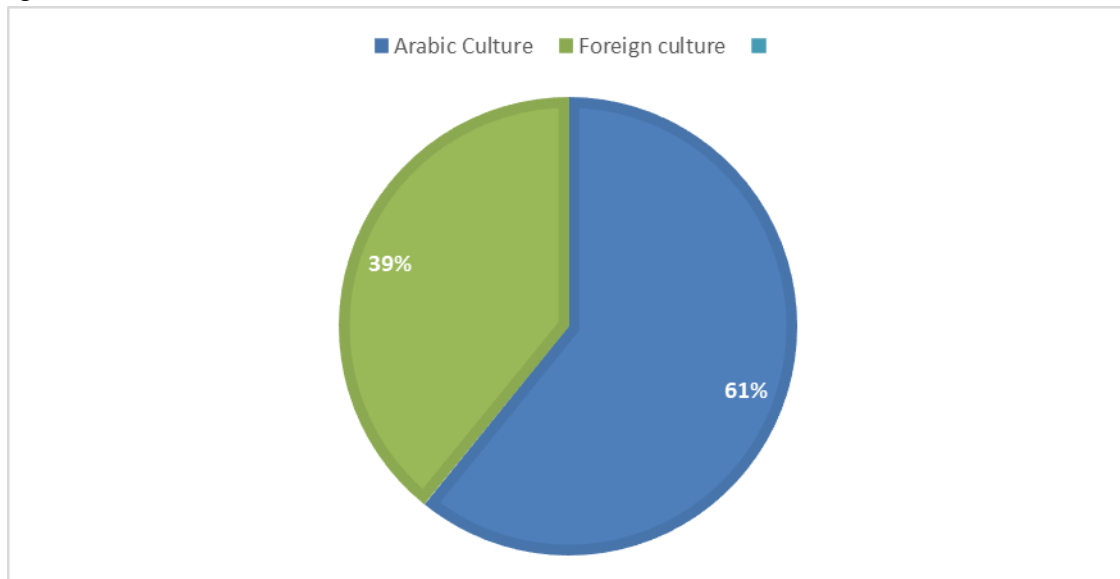
## 4. Findings

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the cultural aspects have been surveyed and analyzed according to their occurrence in the **PAB 6** as shown in Table 4.1, Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2.

Table 4.1. Occurrences and Percentages of Cultural Aspects in PAB6

No.	Cultural Aspect	Total		Arabic		Foreign	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Names	27	31.03	21	77.8	6	22.2
2	Titles	5	5.7	0	0.0	5	100.0
3	Man's Jobs	10	11.5	7	70.0	3	30.0
4	Woman's Jobs	6	6.9	4	66.7	2	33.3
5	Pictures	18	20.7	10	55.6	8	44.4
6	Food	7	8.05	3	42.9	4	57.1
7	Celebrations	3	3.4	2	66.7	1	33.3
8	Geography	10	11.5	5	50.0	5	50.0
9	Currency	1	1.1	1	100.0	0	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>60.9</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39.1</b>

Figure 4.1



There are 27 names appear in the PAB 6; 77.8% related to the Arabic culture and 22.2 % related to the foreign culture. The names are Wisam, Dania, Ammar, Basim, Hiba, Farah, Ahmed, Nadima, Nadia, Huda, Al-Bairuni, Samira, Rami, Khalid, Adam, Amal, Manal, Samer, Majd, Nada, Mariam, Han, Mr. Bell, Mr. Benz, Mr. Baggage, Mrs. Lovelace and Mr. Grum (George Grum). Wisam, Dania, Ammar, Basim and Hiba are the main characters and have highly frequent occurrence throughout the PAB 6. Other Arabic names have very low frequency between one to five times. Al-Bairuni appears in a biography on famous mathematicians contributed to the invention of computer. Han, a Chinese boy, appears in a paragraph in a magazine talking about his family and their business in a comparison with Farah's family. Mr. Bell, Mr. Bens, Mr. Baggage, Mrs. Lovelace and Mr. Grum George appear in biographies on the invention of the telephone, the car, the computer and French fries.

Titles category has five-time occurrence; 100% of titles are related to the foreign culture; Mr. Bell, Mr. Benz, Mr. Baggage, Mrs. Lovelace and Mr. Grum. There is no Arabic titles at all.

In Man's jobs category, there are ten jobs; 70% related to the Arabic culture: an engineer, a farmer, a waiter, a driver, a pilot, a mathematician and an IT programmer; and 30% related to the foreign culture: a farmer, an engineer and a chef.

In Woman's jobs category, there six clear jobs; 66.7% related the Arabic culture: housewife, teacher, doctor and nurse; and 33.3% related the foreign culture: a farmer and a mathematician.

In Pictures category, there are eighteen pictures; 55.6% related to the Arabic culture and 44.4 % related to the foreign culture. There are ten types of pictures referring



to the Arabic culture :elder women wear headscarf (hijab), women wear headscarf at workplace , women without headscarf in conservative clothes inside house and shop of woman clothes, men in casual and formal clothes at workplace , a man in Iraqi police uniform , a fisherman in a boat wearing an old fashion, family gathering to cook or dine , Iraqi Airlines planes and Iraqi flag placed on a school building. In relation to the foreign culture, there are eight types of pictures: Chinese people on a farm, website search engines, an old telephone, an old automobile, an old computer in 1985, robots, spaceships and astronauts.

In Food category, there are seven types of food; 42.9% related to the Arabic culture and 57.1% related to the foreign culture. This category includes three popular Iraqi dishes: makhlama, quzi and biriyani; and four foreign dishes: pizza, potato chips (French fries), spaghetti and macaroni cheese.

In Celebrations category, there are three references; 66.7% related to the Arabic culture and 33.3% related to the foreign culture. This category includes Mother's Day (21<sup>st</sup> March) and Teacher's Day (1<sup>st</sup> March) celebrated in Iraq, and New Year (1<sup>st</sup> January) celebrated all over the world but related to foreign culture.

In Geography category, there are ten countries and cities;50% related to the Arabic culture and 50% related to the foreign culture. This category includes five occurrences of the Arabic culture: Iraq, Egypt, Baghdad, Basra and Dubai; and five occurrences of the foreign culture: China, Russia, Japan, America and London.

Currency includes once occurrence; 100% related to the Arabic culture. Iraqi dinar (IQD) appears twice (on page 26 in Pupil's Book and on page 24 in Activity Book). There is no foreign currency mentioned in PAB 6.

Overall, the Arabic cultural aspects are considerably more frequent than the foreign ones. The Arabic culture constitutes 61% (53 aspects) whereas the foreign culture constitutes 39% (34).

Due to the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is inadequate cultural content covered in PAB6. There are only 87 cultural aspects in PAB 6; 53 related to the Arabic culture and 34 related to the foreign culture. Such inadequacy is confirmed in Al-Obaidi (2015), Al-Akraa (2013) and Cakir (2010).
2. The Arabic culture is dominating over the foreign culture. The number of Arabic cultural aspects are more frequent than the foreign ones. This contrasts Al-Obaidi (2015) where the English culture constitutes the majority of cultural content of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> secondary EFL textbooks. However, Shreeb (2017) reported that little attention was given to the British and American culture. The domination of the Arabic culture (source culture) appears in Al-Hishoush (2006). Such domination happens when the development of FL curriculum is supervised at national level. In case of English for Iraq 6<sup>th</sup> primary, there is one British author against five Iraqi editors and adaptors. On the contrary, the FL textbooks may be in favour of

foreign culture when they are totally developed by foreign authors as noticed in Lee (2009); Chao (2001); Mahmood, Asghar and Hussain (2012); Liu (2013) and Alshammari (2015).

3. The foreign culture tends to be international. There are different experiences from China, Japan, Russia, United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Italy. Examples of such experiences may include paddy fields and manufacture of paper in China; some traditional treatments of common ailments in China, Japan and Russia; the invention of telephone by Mr. Bell and invention of potato chips by Mr. Grum in USA, the invention of automobile by Mr. Benz in Germany; the contribution to the development of the first computer by Mrs. Lovelace and Mr. Baggage from UK and Italian foods such as pizza, spaghetti and macaroni cheese.

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Appendix A: The Checklist of Cultural Aspects

No.	Cultural Aspect	Total		Arabic		Foreign	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Names						
2	Addressing People						
3	Man's Jobs						
4	Woman's Jobs						
5	Pictures						
6	Food						
7	Celebrations						
8	Geography						
9	Currency						
TOTAL							

Appendix B: The Validity Committee of The Checklist of Cultural Aspects

1. Al-Musawi, Fatima Raheem (PhD in teaching EFL, University of Misan)
2. Al-Musawi, Mohammed Taher (PhD in Applied Linguistics, University of Misan)
3. Al-Saedi, Abbas Salih (B.A. in teaching EFL, Misan Education Directorate)
4. Al-Zubedi, Yousif Abdulkareem (B.A. in teaching EFL, Misan Education Directorate)
5. Al-Saedi, Abdulkhaliq Mijbel (B.A. in teaching EFL, Misan Education Directorate)