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Examining Cultural Content of English Textbooks in Iraq Intermediate Schools: A Semiotic Approach

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

وقال تعالى (قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ) صدق الله العلي العظيم الزمر / أية 9

(Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding)

God almighty has spoken the truth

Al-Zumar verse

Dedication

To My Family and My Friends

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Abstract

Culture is considered as patterns of meanings ,embodied in symbolic forms including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds by which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs.One of the most important aims of Foreign Language teaching and learning is to enlarge the understanding between cultures , also one of the main aims behind learning a Foreign Language is the need for international communication and contacts; so teaching culture is an essential part of any Foreign Language programme .This study tackles the examining of cultural content of English textbooks in Iraq intermediate schools: A Semiotic Approach, it consists of five chapters: chapter one is an introduction about the subject and chapter two is a literature review, it tackles culture and content of English textbooks in Iraq intermediate schools. Chapter three is describes the method followed in the study. As for chapter four it includes the data analyses and results of the analyses .The study ends with chapter five which is a conclusion that sum up the research paper.

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Chapter One :Introduction

1.1Problem of the Study

The relationship between language and culture is dynamic. Firstly, language is an important part of culture. It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values and norms. Secondly, language is influenced by culture.Language is one of the most important carriers of culture and reflects the latter. If there is no language, culture would not be known. On the one hand, culture is the basis and one of the most important attributes of language and exerts great influence on the latter. If there is no culture, language will be like water without a source or a tree without root. (Li Sun,2013:371)

The present study tries to answer the following questions

1.What is the way culture manifested in English Language teaching textbooks in Iraq at first intermediate text ?

2. What is the basic relationship between the text and the image?

1.2Aims of the Study

1.3The current study aims at achieving the following :

1. Identifying the cultural content found in the textbooks and classify it according to its respective dimensions.

2. Showing how much the textbooks cover the cultural content and what the dominant cultural dimensions are.

1.3 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to analyzing first intermediate stage textbook which is entitled "English for Iraq", students book. The analysis included only
 the cultural content .No other dimensions or aspects included in the analysis.

1.4 The Value of the Study

The current study could be beneficial to the EFL learners in drawing their attention to the importance and/or effect of the culture on the successful learning,it could be also be beneficial to the EFL teachers, and text designers to give more emphasis on culture dimensions when teaching English.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Language and Culture

Language is a system of human communication that is used to convey needs, requirements, requests, wishes, desires, and ideas. By language, people give voice to ideas and outlooks. Differences become known and apparent, thoughts verbalized and by the use of the language, people convey their ideas or points of view and proven it for other people.

Language use is determined by culture norms. Such notion is concluded from the arguments of many linguists who ascertain that "Culture shapes language". Language and culture of its speakers could not be analyzed in isolation since language cannot exist apart from its culture. (Ali,2017:4)

Culture is covering an extremely wide range of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, views, values, manners, customs and institutions. Culture is defined as a set of attitudes, values, norms, traditions, and goals that particularize a certain group. It is something learned, transmitted, passed down from are generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form face –to-face interaction, and through linguistic communication.

Culture considered as patterns of meanings embodied in symbolic forms including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds by which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs.

Cuture is "a way of life." It is the context within which a group of people "exist,

think, feel, and relate to other. The glue binds a group of people together.(**Ali,2017:4)**

2.2The Teaching of Culture

Scholars and educators showing the necessity of mixing culture teaching with EFL teaching programs.   One of the most important aims of Foreign Language teaching and learning is to enlarge the understanding between cultures , also one of the main aims behind learning an Foreign Language is the need for international communication and contacts. These notions lead many other to make sure that teaching culture is an essential part of any Foreign Language programme. However, there are four views concerning this issue. First, some scholars and specialists in the field of applied linguistics insist that target culture should be learn side by side with learned language in order to acculturate Foreign Language teaching into the culture(s) of the people who speak that language . The second view neglects the teaching of the target culture if the Foreign Language learning belong to countries in which the learned language is an "institutionalized variety ".Another two views support the second view says that when the learned language becomes a lingua franca, for example English, thus, there is no need to teach the target culture   and   the   Foreign
Language   should   be   taught   in   a   culture   free   context

Each language in the world has its own cultural norms. Such norms may be completely different and conflict with other language's norms, thus many communication problems may exist when Foreign Language Learning share the norms of the learned language .

Traditionally, there are two aspects, which linguists focused upon when trying to deal with the notion of teaching culture .They are: (**Ali,2017:4)**

1- Teaching about the foreign culture.

2- Teaching and learning of socio-linguistic ,socio-cultural behavior within the framework of a communicative approach .

2.3 Categories of Culture

Foreign Language textbooks are classified into three categories according to their cultural content. These categories are: (Ali,2017:)

1- Textbooks reflect the learner's source culture.

2- Textbooks reflect the target culture.

3- Textbooks reflect culture other than those mentioned in the first and second type such cultures are called international cultures.

However many researchers tackle cultural content in textbook's but they do not agree on the type of cultural material that should be included in the Foreign Language textbooks .For example the "Common European Framework of reference for language "(CEF)(2001:102) mentions six categories of cultural content .These are

1-Everyday living

2-Living conditions

3-Interpersonal relations

4-Values, beliefs, and attitudes

5-Body language and social conventions

6-Ritual behavior.

Some other researches show a more comprehensive way when they investigate the cultural content. Byram and Morgan (1994:52) present nine topics they believe they should be covered in EFL textbooks. These topics are:

 1- Social identity and social groups

2- Social interaction

3- Belief and behavior

4- socio-political institutions

5- Socialization and the life cycle

6- National history

7- National geography

8- National cultural heritage

9- Stereotypes and national identity.

2.4 Culture in English Foreign Language Contexts

Culture in language teaching and learning is usually defined pragmatically as a/the culture associated with the language being learned.' Is impossible to ignore the strong connection between the language and culture, so it is not surprising that the importance of the cultural component in English Foreign Language is greatly appreciated and encouraged. The study of any language is incomplete if it does not include the cultural components. Also, just like most experts, they argue in favour of the theory that language learning is much more than mere learning of grammar rules and a new vocabulary.

Li Sun (2013) shares their opinion by explaining the main purpose of learning a foreign language, in this case, English. Sun (2013) says that the primary goal is to communicate in the target language, but also to learn customs and

tradition of particular community in order to adjust to the society. (Martina ,2019:12)

2.5 Advantages of learning culture in English Foreign Language lessons

There are three advantages of learning culture in English Foreign Language as the following:

1.Culture increases language student's motivation.

Each language conveys norms, values, implicit theories driven by culture. As a result, teaching a foreign language is teaching a new way to see the world, consciously or not."   Everyone who enters a classroom has a different idea as to where their language is going to take them and how far they wish to go with it.There is, however, one clear goal that every learner shares: to speak more like a native speaker of their target language – That's where culture comes in! Culture is a bridge that allows a language student to sound (and, more importantly, feel) closer to a native speaker of the language. (Robinson,2021:1)

2. Cultural understanding enriches student travel experiences

It is true that knowing the grammatical structures is important to make a sentence, but it does not necessarily mean that we are able to have a conversation with other people. When learning a language, most students aim to travel to a native-speaking country of said language at some point after their studies (or, even better, during their **language studies**). In these cases, learning the culture of their host language is a great way to prepare for life in the country. L*earning the cultural heritage of the language also allows learners to build better relationships with its native speakers as well as peers who learn the language. Taking culture into consideration lessens*

the impact of a culture shock when learners visit the target

country. (Robinson,2021:1)

When travelling abroad students will need to be prepared for how best to present themselves in their new country, or risk falling into a chasm of misunderstandings.Word use, speech patterns, tone – all of these can affect the meaning and reaction to a sentence. Therefore, anyone who's mastered all of the complexities of their target language is likely to get a warm welcome in their host country! (Robinson,2021:1)

3. Culture and language are symbiotic

"Language is culture. There is no way to wrap your mind around the culture of a country if you don't speak the language. Our minds don't create words, words shape our minds our cognition, our way to apprehend the world." Symbiosis, in nature, is when two separate species of organisms maintain a relationship and usually work together for the benefit of both. This idea can be found in any good language school! (Robinson,2021:1)

While grammar and vocabulary are what makes up the bulk of any language, cultural understanding brings this together and allows the student to communicate easier. Neglecting this aspect of language can be damaging to the student's ability to communicate effectively. One of our respondents, who preferred to remain anonymous, phrased this perfectly: Omitted *traditions and manners wouldn't allow the student to become fluent and to speak confidently with native speakers. In fact, communication breakdown often happens because of non-verbal*

misunderstandings. Smiling, bowing, shaking hands, nodding are all examples of non-verbal communication, which differs from culture to culture.(Robinson,2021:1)

2.6 Semiotics Approach

Semiotics is the study of signs that include words, sounds, and even body language. It is the study of meanings, their emergence, and relationship with reality .Merriam-Webster dictionary defines semiotic as a general, philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and real languages and comprises syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. Cambridge online dictionary defines semiotics as a bit simpler when calling it 'a study of signs and symbols, what they mean and how they are used'. (Martina ,2019:12)

Semiotics is any activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, where a sign is defined as anything that communicates something, usually called a meaning, to the sign's interpreter. The meaning can be intentional, such as a word uttered with a specific meaning; or unintentional, such as a symptom being a sign of a particular medical condition. Signs can also communicate feelings (which are usually not considered meanings) and may communicate internally (through thought itself) or through any of the senses: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or gustatory (taste). Contemporary semiotics is a branch of science that studies meaning-making and various types of knowledge.(Campbell,2019:352)

2.7 Definition of Basic Terms:

1 .Content analysis: a research technique aims at making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the context of their use (krippendroff, 2004:18).

2. Culture is defined as the attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of community.(Kramsch ,1996:2)

3.Textbook: it is a book containing a comprehensive compilation of content in a branch of study with the intention of explaining it. Textbooks are produced to meet the needs of educators, usually at educational institutions(HarperCollins,1969)

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As a research procedure, content analysis normally includes recognizing units for analysis in a well-defined textual   example, coding those units depending on the earlier standards built up by the researcher, at that point lessening the information by measuring the outcomes lastly making inferences about the essentialness of the

outcomes (Weninger, 2018: 5). The exact use of content analysis has shifted depending on the subject or focal point of textbook research. For example, when inspecting the depiction cultural elements and content and analysing them from the semiotic point of view , the research tackles the depiction of cultural elements like local and international names of people from two gender (male and female) , gender roles in the visual substance of textbooks, a researcher may start the analysis by coding all cases where the cultural elements and content   are referenced or delineated.

3.2 Data of the Study

In order to examine the cultural elements in the EFL learners' curricula, the data of the study consisted of Iraqi English language student"s book, and activity book 1th grade in intermediate schools.

3.3 Data Collection

The researcher collected the raw data from the student's and activity books from the English books of the first stages in the intermediate English textbooks for analysing how there are cultural elements and content in these English Textbooks. In the first stage, the researcher searched for the cultural items in the student"s book and classified them according to their presence, force, and type to the different cultural items and showing them in percentages, and whether they are local or international, and the same process in the activity book is also followed.

3.4 Analysis Description

The analysis begins with general description of the content of the two books:namely students'book and activity book.Then an analysis of the cultural content for all units is done.The analysis includes frequency, percentage, and table listings for each unit.Next , the researcher discusses the results and includes a final table cultural contents.

The researcher analyzed data in terms of frequencies and percentages, then

displayed them in tables as follows:

1. The number of all items of the student 's book and activity book were recorded manually using a summary sheet.

2. Showing the items in a table according to the unit, its force and presence, its type and whether it is local or international

3. Results were presented in terms of frequencies and percentages.

3.5 Content Analysis Objectives

 There are different objectives to be accomplished through the content

analysis framework of the textbooks. They are as follows:

1. Whether the local cultural items and international cultural items are very much coordinated into the specified textbooks.

2. Whether the local literary items and international literary items are very much coordinated into the specified textbooks.

3. Whether the cultural and literary items create motivation in learning the foreign language.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

4. 1 Introduction

In this section the researcher sets out a thorough analysis of the cultural contents and items of the students and activity books. It represents the practical part of the study which is concerned with analyzing the cultural content and items to accomplish the aims and goals of the research. In this study, the researcher has utilized the descriptive-analytical method for research The procedures that are being utilized in the current chapter involve a framework of content analysis used to assess the cultural contents of the " English for Iraq " textbook for the first preparatory stage.

4.2 General Description of the Textbook

To accomplish the study, the researcher utilized the " English for Iraq" series which is certified by the Ministry of Education in Iraq for teaching English in Iraqi public and private schools for all stages. The analysis centers around the textbook of the first intermediate stage. The researcher tends to analyze the student's book and the activity book. The student's book has 99 pages, it consists of eight units. It opens

with a book map in which each unit is mentioned with its name and how the aspects of listening and speaking, reading and writing, grammatical areas and

functions, and lexical areas of each unit are arranged. At the end of the map, the following sides are mentioned with their page numbers: grammar and functions reference, a checklist for written work, transcript, and wordlist.

 The activity book has 128 pages , it consists of eight units. It contains tasks to consolidate and practice language presented in the student's book. The exercises also develop the skills of listening, reading and writing and help the students improve their learning skills. There are examination tips and test yourself activities, specifically designed to help the students revise for the examination. The following table gives the information particularized for the student's book and the activity book:

Book	Title	Publisher Author/s.	Number of Pages	Data of Publication
Student's Book	UK by Garnet Education	Terry O' Neill , Peter Snow and Paul Drury	99	2014
Activity Book	UK By Garnet Education	Terry O' Neill , Peter Snow and Paul Drury	128	2014

Table (1) Information about Student's Book and Activity Book

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4.3 Analysis of the Cultural Content in the Student's and Activity Books

4.3.1 Unit One

4.3.1.1 Student's Book

On analyzing Unit One, (18) different cultural items were found. These items can be summarized as follows: historical sites , daily routine, animals,Name of counties and cities, food types , market places, life style of Australian and Iraqi characters, Male/Female representation, aspects of modern culture and drinks ,like : watching giraffes at zoo, swift bird, collecting seashell, camping, Baghdadi museum, cooking fish, visiting iraqi ruins, at firday never being at home, take animals at Africa, collecting stamps about other countries, pelican bird, Iraqi traditional market, Hatra, Ur, Marshes in Iraq,Ghe the Citadel in Erbil, and daily routine if some characters from different places. For example ,the following figures:

a — football

b — the Citadel in Erbil

c — Hatra

d — Ur

e — a traditional market

f — marshes in the sóuth

Such pictures exploring the Iraqi culture, like football is the most favourite sport in Iraq , and the players in pictures (a) of this figure is the most famous Iraqi palyer in the international Iraqi team, picture (b) shows a castle of citadel in Erbil which is one of the most ancient castles and historical site in Iraq. Picture (c) showing Harta as one of the ancient cities it lies in Upper Mesopotamia in present-day eastern Nineveh Governorate in northern Iraq. The city lies 290 km (180 mi) northwest of Baghdad and 110 km (68 mi) southwest of Mosul. While , picture (d) is about Ur was an important Sumerian city-state in ancient Mesopotamia, located at the site of modern Tell el-Muqayyar in south Iraq's Dhi Qar Governorate in Mesopotamia. Picture (e) , is about the international Iraqi market especially the folk one, and the last picture (f) , it is about fishing and living in marshes in South part

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of Iraq. Such figure explores the Iraqi culture by using signs ,but these Signe are communicative .

4.3.1.2Activity Book

On analyzing Unit One, (14) different cultural items were found. These items can be summarized as follows: names of places and people especially certain nemes that are particularized to certain cultures like Richard for America, and Sameera for Iraq, daily life routine of Ahmed and his family in America, daily life routine of Hana and Rafel, Daily life routine of characters who are training on Monday evening,who make food, and one who like travel across countries, talking about ancient places, citadel, marsh, Ziggurat, Ur, Hatra and talking about animals like cheetah and lion. As it is shown in the following figure:


it is about tge holiday of Ahmed and his family to new York, the are talking about their life style and routine there in new York, how they stay in hotel,how they went to the cinema, went to the park, went to the Central park .

4.3.2 Unit Two

4.3.2.1 Student's Book

On analyzing Unit two, (33) different cultural items were found. Including names of people (male and female) name of places and names of things . These items can be summarized as follows: Day in London, New Year Eve, London Eye, first of January, big Wheel, River Thames, break fast, Eid Mubarak, Eid al Fitr, Ramadan, fast from dawn to dusk, bobsleigh, Simon, Yasir, Basra, England, Holiday in December, Christmas, Weather in England , Boronuk. As it is shown below:
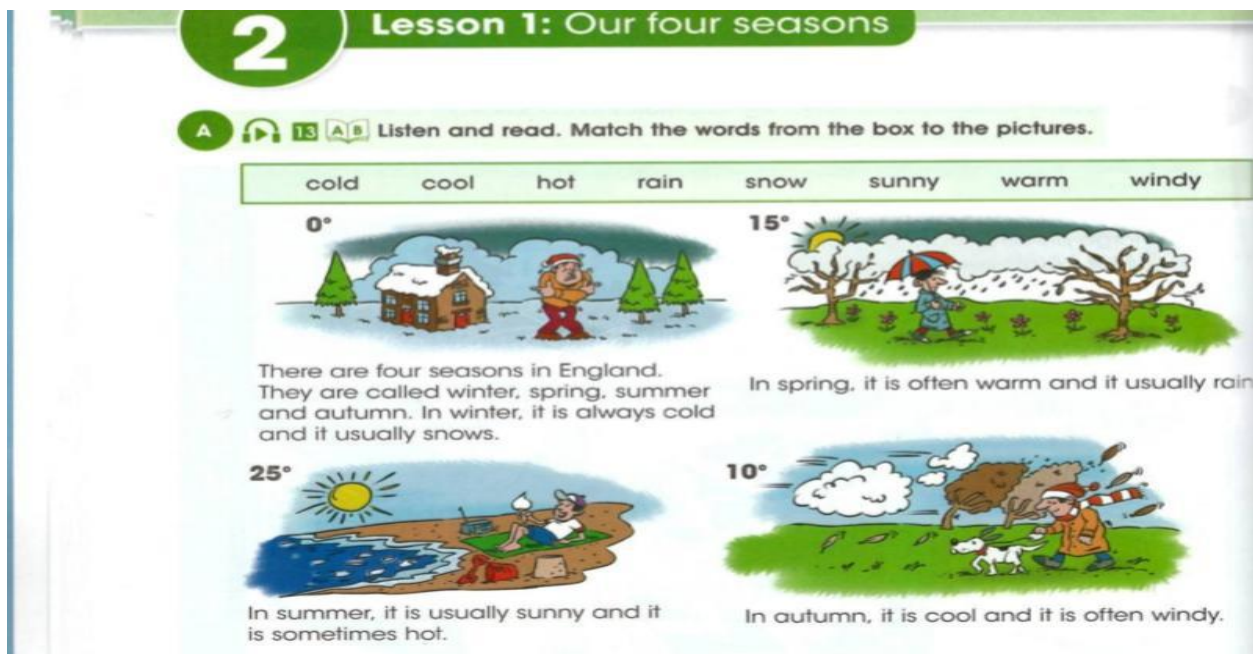

such figure reflecting the four seasons of the year in England, how it is cold snowy, The pine tree which is famous tree in England, summer is hot and sunny, how people spend their time in summer at sea، spring is rainy and and warm autumn is windy and warm, and cool, and people wearing heavy clothes in winter , autumn and spring. the shape of their houses that triangle roof .

4.3.2.2. activity Book

On analyzing unit two, (37) different cultural items were found. These items can be summarized as follows: eat snow with spoon, winter in England,rain in Iraq, capital of Iraq,three countries in Africa, Ramadan, Name of people(male and female) from different countries are meeting like Jack, Yasir,Sara, Simon, Ramzi, Botonuk, Iraqi armed forces day, Eid al Fitr, Christmas, Bobsleigh as a fastest sport in winter, break the fast, new year's Day.
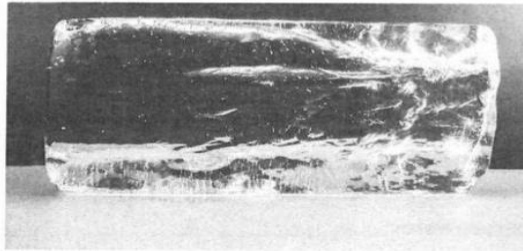

Such figure depicting the life style in Boronuk and their problems in winter in xar engine in water in phone and glasses.

4.3.3 Unit Three

4.3.3. 1 Student's Book

On analyzing unit three, (26) different cultural items were found including the local and international names of different people from different cultures and places . These items can be summarized as follows: Japanese people, daily life routine about the children in Japan that they can be responsible, clean anything dirty at school, work in team, sweeping the floor at school, clean desks, People of Rwanda, people in Rwanda pock up rubbish and sweeping the streets,Chores, The Archers, Gwen, Len, Hippo Roller, Zeena, Salman, Ghost Story, Ahmed, elephant, Gran, Noor, Dana, Maryam, The Hungry Fox story, Chicken, wolf, Shepherd Story, Rachel, Molly, and Helen. As it is shown below in the following figure:
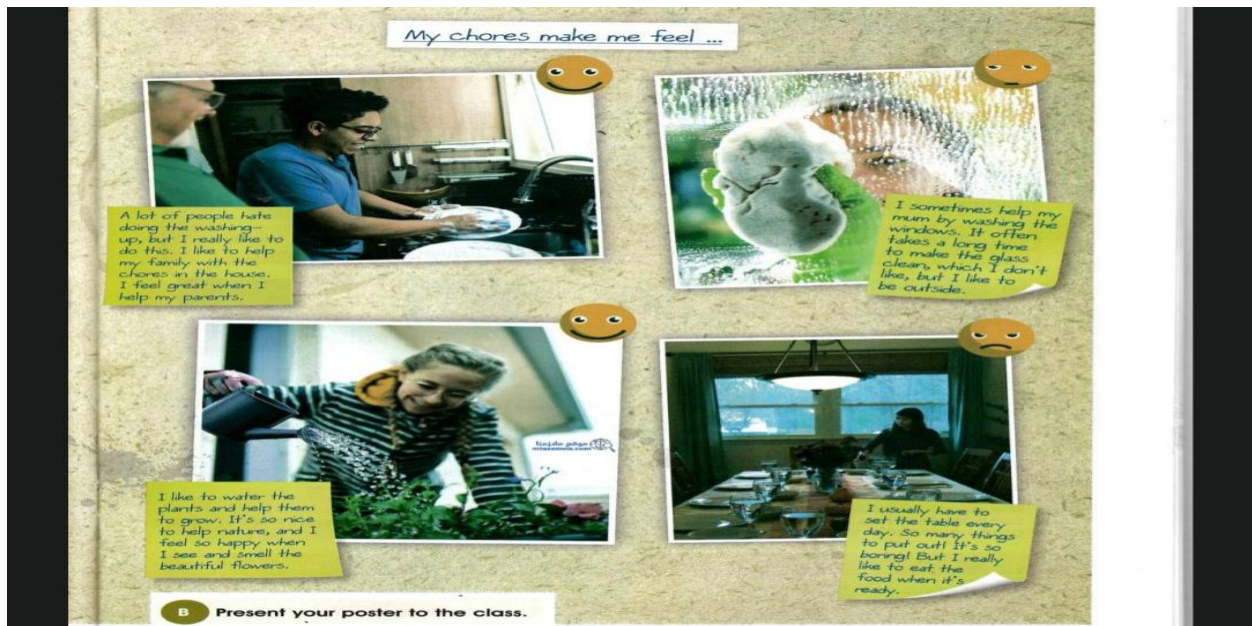

It is about how the chores make them feel. How people hate doing the washing up , helping family , feeling great by helping parents, it is also about people who like

watering how they are feeling happy washing windows to make the glass clean each picture reflects a life style of people who are English.

4.3.3.2 Activity Book

On analyzing Unit three, (17) different cultural items were found concerning the local and international names of people and places that are related to different cultures and all of them are concerning with attributing certain cultures . These items can be summarized as follows: international places , local and international (Countries, cities,), local and international names (male and female) , local and international family members , international aspects of modern culture they are as in the following: Joe, Julie, Tamara, Salman, Gran, Jim, Iman, Malek, Huda, Zeena,, Shepherd story, wolf, sheep, Khalid,Burgers, Japanese, Rwanda, chores, hippo roller. Such names are particularized to certain cultures for example the names of Joe and Julie are related to English culture, zeens and Salman are related to Arabic culture and so on. Daily life routine of people in Japan and Rwanda who they live their lives .
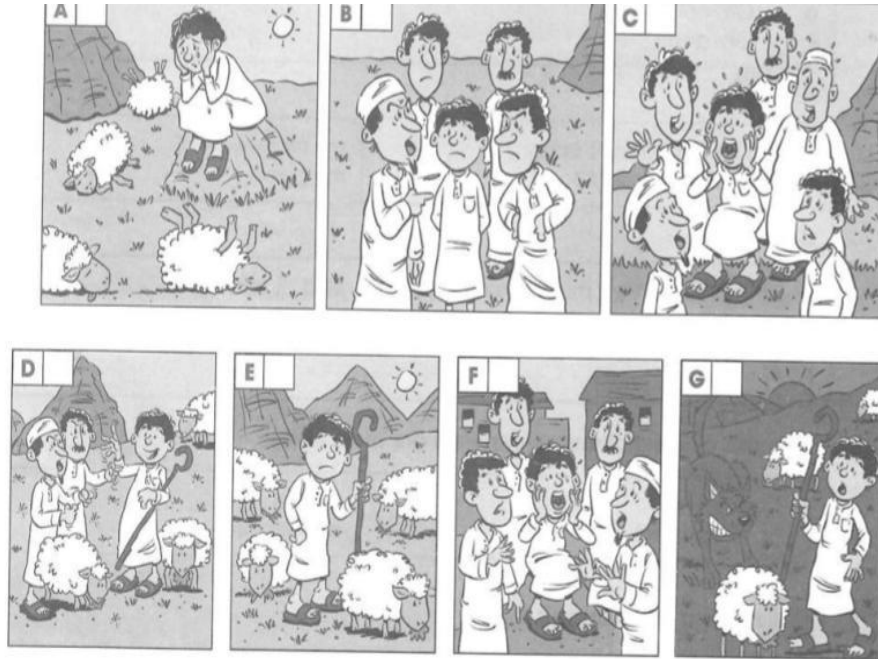
Such figure exploring the cultural life style of the Arabic characters because the are wearing white garments , Arab people are known for being shepherd in the last times before many centuries and this is story in the figure it is about the shepherd in the rural area who lies on his group by telling them that the wolf eat his sheep and asking them for help but when they come to his help they found no wolf and his sheep are save.

4.3.4 Unit Four

4.3.4. 1 Student's Book

On analyzing Unit four, (4) different cultural items were found. These items can be summarized as follows: name of food and building gorilla monkey snake at desert. As it is shown below in the following figure:

One day, Muna was having lunch in the café with her mother and father. Suddenly, a monkey came in through the door. Muna was frightened.

'Look, Mummy!' she screamed. 'A gorilla!'

'No, no, Muna. It's not a gorilla. It's just a little monkey,' said Mrs Saif. She wanted to calm Muna down.

The monkey stayed near the door. It was very thin.

'It's starving,' said Mr Saif. 'It wants some food.'

Suddenly, the monkey jumped up onto their table and grabbed a burger from Mr Saif's plate.

'Hey! Stop that!' he shouted.

The monkey leapt over to another table and grabbed some salad. All the waiters chased the monkey, but they could not catch it. It knocked over a table and all the drinks spilt onto the floor. It threw food everywhere and then escaped through the door. All the people in the café helped tidy up the mess.

'Where did it come from?' asked Mr Saif.

It is about the life style of Muna who is a female character , how was having lunch outside and a monkey visit him, who was an English character .where Gorilla or monkey are famous there even in restaurant .

4.3.4. 2 Activity Book

On analyzing Unit four, only one cultural elements is being found in this unit which is about the crocodile that are being found in America which is considered as a cultural as it is shown below in the figure:

It is about how crocodile are being wide spread in America , they are evey where , beside the restaurant and parks .

The results are shown in the following table including the frequencies and percentage of the occurrence of the cultural elements and content in in the four selected units for each book ,the first four units in the student's book and the first four in the activity book of English Language of first intermediate stage .

Unit	Frequency of cultural elements and content in Student's Book	Percentage	Frequency of cultural elements and content in the Activity Book	Percentage
One	**18**	**22%**	**14**	**20%**

Two	33	41%	37	55%
Three	26	32%	17	24%
Four	4	5%	1	1%
Total	81	100%	69	100%

Table (2) Frequency and Percentage of Cultural elements and content in English Textbook of (1ˢᵗ intermediate stage)

As it is shown just above in table number two , unit Two has the highest percentage and frequency   of the cultural elements and content in the student's book it occurs 33 time which equals (41 %) , similar to unit two in the activity book of the first intermediate stage of English   also has the highest percentage and frequency of the cultural elements and content which equals (55%) and account 37 occurrence.

Chapter Five:Conclusion, Recommendations and Suggestions for further Study

5.1 Conclusion

Cultural content: Refers to the symbolic meaning, artistic dimension and cultural values that originate from or express cultural identities in the Iraqi EFL first intermediate stage textbook . Semiotics concerns everything that can be perceived as a sign and it is a linguistic field that is complementary and can be seen be as a level of basic traditional the beyond studies linguistic expands It moves sentence the and phoneme the; structure of ideological their discover to order in discourse and texts.Broadly speaking, semiotics is the study of cultural signs and symbols, and semiotic analysis is a deeper look into the unconscious cultural patterns that shape consumer behaviour and response to textual messages, thematic content and still or video imagery.

The finding of the study shows that unit Two has the highest percentage and frequency of the cultural elements and content in the student's book it occurs 33 time which equals (41 %) , similar to unit two in the activity book of the first intermediate stage of English also has the highest percentage and frequency of the cultural elements and content which equals (55%) and account 37 occurrence.

5.2 Recommendations and Suggestions for further Study

Recommendations

There should be a greater focus on culture in English language books in Iraq, and that book designers should pay more attention to it. Language teachers should also focus on teaching culture and not only on teaching grammar and vocabulary.

Suggestions.

There should be a complete cultural analysis of the cultural content in English language books in Iraq and for all stages in order to identify the mistakes and interests of language learners and work to find a balance between the local culture and the target culture in the intermediate school books.

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