Cultural and Cross-Cultural Stances in the Reading Texts of the Algerian Secondary School, Year Three Textbook: A Social Semiotic Evaluation

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of foreign language teaching keeps changing so as to fit the new demands that emerge from various contexts and which are – in a way or another – related to the rapid and growing globalisation. This situation sets further challenges to the teaching of English as an international language mainly as it concerns the adopted textbooks that are no longer seen as mere linguistic materials but as social discourses. As such, EFL textbooks’ cultural components are being reconsidered as a dialogue whose primary aim is to promote intercultural understanding.

Taking this shift in the roles of EFL textbooks into consideration, this paper aims at examining and evaluating the type(s) of cultural content(s) that are included in New Prospects (2007), the currently used Algerian EFL textbook designed along the Educational Reform, so as to highlight the place granted to both national and foreign culture(s). It further seeks to discover whether the inclusion of the target culture(s) is meant to encourage intercultural understanding as a means to cope with globalisation. To achieve these objectives I will examine a sample of the reading texts that are included in the material and which may be considered as vehicles for both national and target culture(s). To analyse the selected texts I adopt Halliday’s functional systemic theory (1978, 1985) wherein language is seen as a social semiotic and texts as simultaneously constituting and constituted by the cultural context.

2. Review of the Literature

In this section, I introduce the social semiotic theory, systemic functional linguistics, and culture teaching issues in EFL textbooks, which are the theoretical means by which I evaluate the selected reading texts.

2.1. Halliday’s Social Semiotic Theory and Language Teaching

Halliday’s social semiotic theory is presented in his well known functional systemic linguistics work (1078, 1985) (also known as systemics) which he elaborated along years of enquiry and which stood outside the mainstream formal linguistics of the 1960’s. Within the framework of this theory language is seen as a social semiotic. The term ‘systemic’ denotes the complexity of the language as a network of systems or of interrelated systems. In addition, this theory places the functions of language as primary trying to understand what it is that language does and how it accomplishes it. In other words, systemics looks at how language acts upon and is constrained by the social context in which it functions.

According to Halliday, the way into understanding about language lies in the study of texts and their contexts explaining that “There is text and there is other text that accompanies it: text that is ‘with’, namely the con-text.” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 05) Texts are considered as semiotic mediators and as such the relevant unit of study. To elucidate the notion of context in the study of texts, the linguist draws on Malinowski’s (1923) distinction between the two notions of ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture.

To start with, the context of situation includes three features of situational parameters that help participants to make predictions about the kinds of meaning that are being exchanged. These are: field,
tenor and mode of discourse. They serve to interpret the social context of the text. In other words, they constitute the environment in which meanings are being exchanged.

1-The Field of Discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?

2- The Tenor of Discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationships obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved?

3-The Mode of Discourse refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its functions in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 12)

All of these three features play an important role in the interpretation of texts. Field of discourse, for instance, plays a vital role in the context of text being one of the three basic elements in the textual internal world and external world. Tenor of discourse, as it is concerned, indicates the relationship between discourse participants (e.g. speaker / writer and hearer / reader) as manifested in language use. As for the mode of discourse, it is the third basic strand of register. It is the formal strand in which language is used, or, to use Halliday’s terms, it refers to what part the language is playing.

The second element of context is the context of culture. Like context of situation, context of culture is an important element through which texts can be comprehended. Halliday makes it clear that:

the context of situation, however, is only the immediate environment. There is also a broader background against which the text has to be interpreted: its context of culture. Any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor, and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality – a package, so to speak, of things that typically go together in the culture. People do these things on these occasions and attach these meanings and values to them; this is what culture is. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 46)

The context of culture, then, is what an observer needs to know about the broader culture in order to understand the meaning of what is said or written.

Another important aspect of Halliday’s conception of language as a social semiotic consists of his viewing language as a functional system that evolves as a system of ‘meaning potential’ or a set of resources which influence what the speaker can do with language in a particular social context. So according to him, the grammar of language is a system organised by the different functions of the language. In fact, “function will be interpreted not just as the use of language but as a fundamental property of language itself, something that is basic to the evolution of the semantic system. This amounts to saying that the organisation of every natural language is to be explained in terms of a functional theory.” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 17)

The language then, is a system of meaning potentials and a set of resources. The meanings are of different kinds though they identify three main metafunctions of language:

1-Ideational (Experiential) metafunction: it is concerned with how language captures reality and our experience of the world. The experiential metafunction has largely to do with the transitivity system of
language. The transitivity system views language in terms of ‘processes’ which are realised by verbal groups.

2-Interpersonal metafunction: it is concerned with how language establishes interpersonal relations between speaker / writer and hearer / reader. This basically involves an investigation of the ‘mood’ block of the clause, which comprises three elements; subject, finite and / or adjuncts.

3-Textual metafunction: it is concerned with the overall organisation of the clause, and above it, the text. It is largely concerned with theme and rheme. The theme of the clause is that which sets the local context for the rest of the clause to develop.

These metafunctions play a considerable role in the interpretation of texts and their contexts. They render communication much more understandable in the social context. Starting from the 1990’s Halliday’s social semiotic model is increasingly influencing the field of language teaching. In fact his early claim that “learning is, above all, a social process, and the environment in which educational learning takes place is that of a social institution” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 05) is at the basis of a social semiotic approach to language teaching advocated by scholars such as Kramsch who grants culture, context, and communication all their importance in the domain of language teaching.

Kramsch (2002) explains that this social semiotic approach draws on Halliday’s teachings and is based on several poststructuralist principles that do not invalidate but go beyond communicative approaches to language learning. Furthermore, it follows three main principles:

1) The first principle states that “there is no such thing as language without historically situated language users or meaning makers in the local context of their communicative practices. Every word uttered or written is addressed by someone to someone about something and for someone’s benefit at a particular juncture in time.” (Kramsch, 2002)

2) The second principle draws on the fact that because of each language user’s unique place in history, each word spoken or written bears the traces of its prior uses as well as of its uses in lexical collocations or co-occurrences.

3) The third principle is that language learning is a social, dialogic process of meaning making. Whereas traditional views of language learning see it as an “incremental accumulation of atomistic structures that moves the learner from word to sentence, from sentence to paragraph, and from paragraph to text, a social semiotic approach considers language as holistic network of various signs in the environment, including gestures, silences, body postures, graphic and other visual and acoustic symbols which shape a context of meaning and invites us to respond to it” (Kramsch, 2002)

This approach looks to language learning as an interactional activity and situates it within its social context. It further rehabilitates the role of culture in language teaching materials which has been at the heart of hot debates. However, it attempts to cross the boundaries between the cultures and tries to establish a kind of dialogic relation between the national and the target cultures. So, one of its aims is intercultural communicative competence that would secure cross-cultural understanding.

2.2. Culture Teaching and Cross-cultural Issues in EFL Textbooks

Even if the concept of culture lacks a homogeneous agreed upon definition, thus meaning different things to different people, language teaching professionals be they applied linguists, educationalists, materials and textbook designers or language teachers all agree that it is a key component in language learning/teaching. In their attempts to provide a useful definition of culture, Hudson (1993) proposes to
look at it as “a socially acquired knowledge” and Kramsch (1998) sees it as “membership in a discourse community that shares a common space and history, and common imaginings”.

Both definitions herald that culture is a property of a social group and thus make it clear that culture differs from one group to another and by extension from one country to another. When it comes to foreign language teaching such a situation raises the controversial issue of what kind of culture to incorporate in textbooks; the local national culture, the target culture(s), or rather a combination of both? In the early approaches to foreign language teaching the material designers tended to take quite extreme positions. They either argued in favour of the local national culture or by contrast, fervently defended the target language culture as the only legitimate culture to figure in the textbooks. In other words, their positions were implicitly or explicitly translating attitudes of enculturation or acculturation of the learners.

Later on, taking as their starting point the noticed limitations of the two opposing alternatives, a group of scholars among whom Byram (1989), Kramsch(1993), Seely (1993), to name but a few, decided to adopt another approach within which the learners’ local national culture is included and present with the foreign language target culture(s). These scholars argue that textbooks relying only on the home culture, which - in many cases - does not have parallels with the target culture, fail to prepare learners to function successfully in authentic real life situations. They further explain that the absence of the target culture(s) in their learning materials may lead the learners to experience a kind of culture-shock whenever suddenly meeting culturally unfamiliar situations. That is why Alptekin (2002) highlights the necessity of teaching the target language in relation o its own culture affirming that “learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language and its speakers.” (Alptekin, 2002:58)

On the opposite case, exposing learners to foreign cultural values and norms regardless of their own home culture prevents them from using their background knowledge to express their ideas and thoughts or to cope with the new situations at hand which might be frustrating to them. To avoid such apprehension Miller and Valdès (1995) insist that “a language learner must first be made aware of himself as a cultural being” (Miller and Valdès, 1995: 09) what might rehabilitate her/his self confidence and home culture security.

In recent years and pertaining to issues of globalisation, there emerges another position as concerns the place and the type of culture to include in foreign language teaching textbooks. This new tendency seeks for a dialogic approach that does not only see culture as facts and meanings but as “a place of struggle between the learners’ meanings and those of native speakers” (Kramsch, 1993: 24). It is informed by the work of Bakhtin (1986) and holds the principles of dialogism which addresses problems of language, culture, and self on a fundamental philosophical level. Besides, it aims to establish learners’ cultural third spaces as advocated by Bhabha (1994) and Kramsch (1998) through critical activity that combines/confronts local and target cultures.

Textbooks designed along the principles of this approach include diversified cultural components that enclose elements from the local national culture and others from the target language cultures. By using them, learners are expected to build bridges between their culture and that of the language they are learning in a way that allows them to construct an intercultural awareness; a process of becoming more aware of and developing better understanding of one’s own culture and other cultures all over the world. As Byram (1997) explains, this is what might increase cross-cultural understanding.

3. Description of the Textbook

New Prospects (2007), which is the subject of the present evaluation, is the official EFL textbook used in Algerian high schools (Lycée). It is designed as part of the general Educational Reform and meant to
cater for the needs of third year learners. What characterises most this material is that it complies with the new syllabus as laid out by the National Curriculum Committee of the Ministry of National Education.

**New Prospects** is designed along the principles of the competency-based language teaching approach. Moreover, it has an explicit thematic orientation. It consists of six units dealing with the six main themes covered by the syllabus. All of these units have the same layout. Hence each of them comprises two main parts with two sequences each. The first part, “Language Outcomes,” is divided into “Listen and Consider” and “Read and Consider.” The aim of this part is getting the learners to internalise the thematic and linguistic tools. The second part of the unit, entitled “Skills and Strategies Outcomes,” is essentially concerned with the structural and discursive aspects of the texts. The interest is to get the learners develop their compositional skills and communication strategies. This part comprises two sequences “Listening and Speaking” and “Reading and Writing” which focus both on the linguistic as well as social skills inside and outside of the classroom.

To achieve all these objectives **New Prospects** includes different exercises whose aim is to develop the communicative and intercultural competences of the learners. Besides, it presents a considerable selection of authentic and adapted texts that illustrate the various uses of the English language and at the same time highlight the selected themes. These texts belong to various genres ranging from descriptive, argumentative to expository types and do even include narratives, poetry (songs), radio interviews, cultural guides, and encyclopaedia articles. These features make of **New Prospects** a teaching/learning material that would inform about the type of cultural components and stances it includes. It, also offers an extended scope of the various uses of the English language that would help the learners both constitute an idea about the English culture and its social values.

Besides, as concerns culture, **New Prospects** includes both overt and covert cultural information. The first category comprises aspects that deal with elements such as food, movies, music, while the second category makes reference to beliefs, attitudes and values. In addition, it mentions a myriad of different countries and cultures in an attempt to establish a relationship between them. Thus, Unit One, which is entitled “Exploring the Past”, includes a listening text entitled “The Spread of Civilisation in the Maghrib and its Impact on Western Civilisation” and a reading text entitled “Algeria at the Crossroads of Civilizations” which mention several historical facts as well as many different countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco,...etc. Still within the first unit we can read an account about the Egyptian way of life, beliefs, traditions, and historical achievements. In the other units we find reference to other countries like Russia, France, and Germany. There are also extracts tackling education issues in Great Britain and America. Besides are included a set of passages and texts that deal with universal aspects not particularly tied with any specific culture.

For this analysis I choose to deal with a corpus of reading texts included in the six units. So, I select from each unit the reading text that is included under “Read and Consider” section. My choice of these reading texts as a material for evaluating cultural components in the textbook emerges out of the role such texts play as vehicles of cultural transmission in foreign language teaching. Thus our corpus includes the following texts:

- Text 1: “Algeria at the Crossroads of Civilizations” (p22)
- Text 2: “Imitating Property is Theft” (p54)
- Text 3: “Education in Britain” (p83)
- Text 4: “How is your energy Balance?” (p114)
- Text 5: “The Solar System” (p143)
- Text 6: “Feelings” (p174)
4. Analysis and Discussion

In this section I present the analysis and the discussion of the results using Halliday’s social semiotic categories. I am, consequently, going to discuss both of the context of situation and the context of culture of each text.

4.1. Reading Texts’ Context of Situation

The examination of the six reading texts included in New Prospects according to their context of situation reveals the type(s) of cultural components they take account of. This examination is based on the concepts of field, tenor, and mode of discourse as stipulated in Halliday’s social semiotic theory. It further shows whether and/or how the various cultural components help the learners to develop an intercultural competence necessary for any cross-cultural communication they may engage in if they aspire to achieve intercultural understanding.

For more clarity and readability we first provide the discussion of each text individually and then we more to consider the overall outcomes.

Text 1: “Algeria at the Crossroads of Civilizations” (p22)

“Algeria at the Crossroads of Civilisations” is an adapted text taken from The Encyclopaedia of Africanna. It can be classified as belonging to the culture–specific type as it highlights the learners’ local culture. Besides, its content portrays culture as historical facts. It, in fact, looks to the theme of civilization as historical heritage not from a humanistic universal perspective accounting for mankind’s shared achievements but rather as related to Algeria’s specific history.

• Field of discourse: this text is an informative one. It overviews the varied cultural and historical heritage left by the diverse influences on Algeria over history going from the prehistoric rock paintings to the famous white-washed military fortification known as Casbah and built under the Ottoman rule. It presents such historical information in a chronological order and provides concrete illustrations for each epoch without missing to point to the advantageous aspects of such a diverse cultural heritage. This very aspect is first made prominent by the title which is an informative one allowing to guess the text’s content through orienting the readers towards the main theme.

• Tenor of discourse: though with an overwhelming objective tone (actually imposed by the field) this text includes some involving instances that address the readers in a direct way as if to suggest a kind of interactivity. These involving instances are mainly achieved by the writer’s use of the inclusive personal pronouns “we” and “our”; eg. “as our country.” (p22), “we need inorder for us”(p22). This may suggest that the writer is an in-group member and belongs to the same culture as the readers (in the case being the Algerian learners) In addition to this, there is a kind of manipulating transaction wherein the writer tries to influence the readers through providing her/his point of view using evaluative adjectives. eg. “layers of well-refined cultures.” (p23)

• Mode of discourse: this text is of the type written to be read. Therefore, it does not include any spontaneous interactivity. However, it can be seen with a certain attempt to persuasion due to the writer’s resort to the use of evaluative words such as “the most important position among the historic sites” (p23), “speak eloquently of the fruitful contact” (p23)

In “Algeria at the Crossroads of Civilization” the three components of the context of situation that is; field, tenor, and mode are interconnected and interdependent with the three metafunctions of language as defined by Halliday. Therefore, the field which is expressed through the ideational metafunction and which is about the diversified cultural heritage in Algeria plays an important role in determining the
texture (textual metafunction) of the text that includes a series of historical influences hinting thus to the mode. The combination of these elements makes of the text an instance of academic writing. However, the interpersonal metafunction intervenes to break a bit the required objectivity of this type of texts.

In fact, by using inclusive personal pronouns and adopting a manipulating stance, the author wants to show in-group cultural belonging so as to reinforce the readers (in this case the EFL learners) interaction with the text making them accept the cultural diversity of their country which is presented together with other cultures. So, as concerns culture teaching, this reading text’s cultural content is not at all alienating as it is culture-specific and focuses on the learners’ local culture.

Text 2: “Imitating Property is Theft”

“Imitating Property is Theft” is a text taken from The Economist, 17th, 2003. It illustrates culture as a set of values. Moreover, it is not a typically culture-specific text as it deals with the global phenomenon of counterfeiting and its harmful consequences on any country’s economy. However, when it comes to the concrete illustrative cases it makes reference to the text points to cases related to European Union.

Field of discourse: this text addresses the issue of ethics in economy. It aims at raising the consumers’ awareness about the growing phenomenon of counterfeiting. Thus, the field of the text is hinted to right from the beginning with a well-expressed title that reads “Imitating Property is Theft” and which allows to guess the main theme of the text. However, the field remains of the general or informative perspective rather than specialised as it does not deal with the legal implications of the counterfeiting issue.

Tenor of discourse: the author of the paper addresses her/himself to a large target audience which is mainly constituted by The Economist actual or potential readers. The latter are taken as a general reference group of people who are, in a way or another, concerned with the issue of counterfeiting. All along the text they are referred to by the term “consumers” which denotes a class reference, or by the personal pronoun “they” which suggests a distance between the author and themselves. This pertains to say that the author and the audience do not belong to the same group. This fact implies that the writer exercises a kind of authority over her/his audience (readers) and orients this authority to raise their consciousness and make them aware about a dangerous phenomenon wide spread around them, even if they do not always notice it as such. In other words, the text goes with an indirect imperative tone in a communicative interaction where the writer makes an offer (information about counterfeiting and its consequences) but at the same time formulates a demand to the readers (consumers) to change their attitudes towards counterfeiting. Though without imperatives, one can read an implied interaction which looks as a mere fact description but actually acts as an indirect way to alter the readers’ behaviour.

Mode of discourse: this text is a magazine’s article which means that it is of the type written to be read. It is both well structured and illustrated to fit the levels of the target readers (consumers originally and learners in the present context). So, the vocabulary is simple (non-subject specific) with plain words easy to understand by average readers. There are no particular subject-specific concepts the readers should struggle to understand.

In “Imitating Property is Theft” the ideational metafunction of the text is primarily concerned with ethics in economy and so aims at the transmission of culture as values. For this reason, the structure of the text looks like a series of definitions reinforced by concrete illustrating examples from the everyday life that help characterizing the global phenomenon of counterfeiting. Therefore, the textual metafunction highlights both the phenomenon and its harmful consequences on world economy and human welfare. As concerns the interpersonal metafunction, it appears with an illocutionary force to change the audience’s attitude through consciousness rising. The communicative act looks as if the author offers information about counterfeiting and demands from the audience to review their attitudes towards this global phenomenon.
Therefore, as concerns culture this reading text, which is not culture-specific, invites the EFL learners
to think of themselves as belonging to a larger universal culture which shares some values. Put
differently, it gives them an opportunity to think globally and feel concerned with ethics issues in the
world not limiting themselves to local matters only.

Text 3: “Education in Britain”

“Education in Britain” is a text taken from Guide to British and American Culture. It represents culture
as facts and traditions (stereotypes). In addition to this, it is a culture-specific text which illustrates one
particular aspect of the target English culture. As the title suggests, it deals with education in Britain, the
mother country of the English language, and provides certain facts that are contrasted to the American
tradition (the other historically admitted legitimate second mother country of the English language and
often used as a reference in EFL teaching materials).

• Field of discourse: this text is of the informative type as it aims at presenting a particular cultural aspect
which relates to schooling and its importance in the British society. In fact, it deals with the theme of
education in Britain, which it occasionally contrasts to its counterpart in the United States. eg. “This is the
reason why private education is less accepted in Britain than it is in the United States.” (p83), and “This
requirement is more or less similar to what is required by American universities.” (p84) Thus the text
gives a thorough description of the different stages of education as well as the various types of schools
children can attend and how they can attend them.

• Tenor of discourse: this text is characterised by reader anonymity as the writer does not know who the
reader is though s/he might guess it should be someone who desires to know more about the British and
American cultures as portrayed by social institutions such as education. Therefore, there is no opportunity
left for interaction as the writer makes an offer of information that the reader(s) ought to take. Put
differently, this text is a one-way transaction. The latter is grammatically reinforced by the use of the
passive voice which renders the writer’s message an objective description with high modality. Besides,
there are no imperatives or personal pronouns that would involve the readers or make him/her react.

• Mode of discourse: the text, being an extract from a Guide, is of the type written to be read. There is no
interactivity between the communication participants (the writer/readers) and obviously no spontaneity.
Moreover, it presents a descriptive objective tone that aims at highlighting real facts related to education.
Actually, there are no evaluative terms or adjectives that may reveal the writer’s opinion or position. All
the reader gets is a set of objective information about education in Britain at times contrasted to what
exists in America.

In “Education in Britain” the ideational metafunction of the text is well determined by its field
relating to the importance of education in the British society as well as the attitudes of the people towards
the issue. It is highlighted by an objective description of facts relying on the extensive use of declaratives.
The latter help reinforcing the formal character of the text rendering thus the textual metafunction
interdependent with the ideational what increases the realistic modality of the text. And as the text is
characterised by reader anonymity, the interpersonal metafunction is not really made prominent due to the
lack of interaction and the absence of evaluative terms reflecting the author’s stance. The author’s
objective is just to highlight a particular aspect of the British culture and to point to the way it differs
from the American one.

Consequently, as relates to culture teaching, this culture-specific text offers to the EFL learners a
concrete instance of meeting the foreign target culture as part of their language learning. It further offers
them an opportunity to learn about the other’s customs and traditions and discover in which ways they are
different (or alike).
Text 4: “How is your Energy Balance?”

“How is your Energy Balance?” is text whose origin is not provided. Nothing could help to know whether it is an authentic text, an authentic adapted text, or non-authentic text meant simply for the target situation of EFL teaching. As concerns culture, this text presents a view of culture as a set of practices and behaviours that determine a lifestyle. Yet, it is not culture-specific as it tackles the universal theme of food (nutrition) from a scientific point of view. This trans-cultural stance makes it fit both learners’ local culture and the target foreign language culture despite their significant differences.

- Field of discourse: this text is about food. It addresses the issue of recent and growing bad eating habits in modern societies over the world and what negative consequences they can have on human health. It, thus, tries to show the importance of a healthy diet and how it can contribute to achieve energy balance. Consequently this text can be seen as belonging to the consciousness raising type since it aims at warning people about some dangers they do not notice because so subtle and related to everyday practices they hardly think about. This is also included thanks to its inviting title that takes an interrogative form. Moreover, this text ends by calling for governmental intervention to do something so as to stop this public health problem.

- Tenor of discourse: even if the writer knows well to whom her/his message is addressed the text remains impersonal in most of its parts. There are no indexing expressions that would make the reader feel as directly concerned. The term “people” is used as a general reference one to imply that what the text is telling may apply to anyone. The author resorts to such a technique not to hurt the feelings of the readers. Moreover, s/he does this using a suggestive tone in a subtle way that makes the readers rather think about the issue by themselves. This suggestive tone, which acts as indirect performative, is needed when thinking about changing people’s bad habits. However, the writer’s tone sharpens in the last paragraph where s/he tries to involve the readers by using inclusive personal pronouns. eg: “...in our modern times...” (p115), “our governments” (p115) And the writer does not stop here but goes even further to make evaluative comments and openly take position against some types of food adverts hoping that the readers will join him/her in such an enterprise.

- Mode of discourse: this text is looks of the type written to be read. However, containing a certain number of indirect warnings and advice and tackling a public health issue it could adequately fit even the oral mode and appear as a radio talk for instance. In other words it would achieve its purpose even if spoken.

In “How is your Energy Balance?”, which is a non culture-specific text tackling the theme of food, there is a striking report about the recent worldwide spread bad eating habits as reinforced by advertisements and their negative consequences on public health. Therefore the ideational function is determined by this field making the text read as an implied set of advice. This feature affects both the interpersonal and the textual metafunctions of the text. In fact, the author (though not identified) enters in a kind of communion with the audience whose attitudes s/he aims to alter for better by making them aware of some dangers related to unhealthy life style. Thus, the interpersonal metafunction looks manipulative though just in an indirect way. The author does so by setting her/himself as an in-group member of the larger world community. This tactic affects also the textual metafunction giving the text an appearance of a friendly advising talk.

By doing so, this text, which provides another conception of culture as a set of practices that determine a given life style, makes the EFL learners aware of new cultural practices. It further highlights some trans-cultural issues that do not take into consideration the local practices transcending them as universal. All this makes these learners aware that they belong to a larger world and that they are asked to react to it.
Text 5: “The Solar System”

“The Solar System” is a text taken from the *Book of Popular Science* and Alan E. Nourse’s *The Giant Planets*. It presents culture as human achievements and scientific discoveries. It is not a culture-specific one as it deals with a scientific topic.

- **Field of discourse:** this text deals with popular science and tries to explain how the solar system functions. It aims at informing larger non-specialised audiences about some basic notions and facts related to astronomy. Yet, it does not skip to provide some details relating to proportions, weight, and distance of the most known planets, moons, and of course the sun. It also explains how the sun is important for life on Earth.

- **Tenor of discourse:** the knowledgeable writer of the text addresses himself directly to the readers who are supposed to lack access to specific scientific information about astronomy as if giving an interactive lecture or an oral presentation. All over the text he uses “you” and “our” in addressing the audience in an attempt to involve them and share with them a certain experience. This pertains to say that the author does not exercise his authority over the audience.

- **Mode of discourse:** this text is of the type written to be read. However, the oral explanation mode that is met throughout gives an impression that it may well fit also the spoken mode. In fact, the interactive aspect would make of this text a radio or TV talk in a programme that aims at spreading popular science.

In “The Solar System” there is a striking combination of elements and features that deal respectively with formality and informality. In fact, the first is dictated by the field which is related to presenting scientific information and thus sustained by the ideational metafunction. The second, for its part, results from the interpersonal metafunction as the author prefers to identify with the audience and address it in a direct nearly spontaneous way. All this affects the textual function as the written texts sounds as if spoken but still well structured, coherent, and cohesive providing a thorough account of scientific knowledge.

All these characteristics make of this text, which is not culture-specific, a relevant means to provide EFL learners with another view of culture within which it is seen as shared human scientific achievements. It gives them an occasion to feel as members of a larger universal culture that goes over local specificities.

Text 6: “Feelings” (p174)

“Feelings” is a text taken from *The Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*. It is a text that deals with culture as a set of social attitudes and behaviours and thus tackles the notion of traditions. Moreover, it is one that carries a culture-specific content. Actually, it does not address the universal theme of feelings from a trans-cultural perspective that would highlight the humanly shared issue and show different peoples’ attitudes over the world and across culture. It, rather, restricts its scope to the Anglo-American tradition.

Despite of this, it presents the cultural aspects from a contrastive stance that draws attention to how the British and American people, who are generally assumed to be alike, differ in their attitudes towards feelings. So, this text portrays an aspect of the target culture as illustrated by the traditionally admitted legitimate representatives of the English speaking countries. Behind the inclusion of such a text in the textbook we might read an adherence to the traditional view that considers British and American cultures as the only legitimate representatives of English language.

- **Field of discourse:** the text shows the contrast in attitudes towards expressing feelings that characterises British and American people. It hence illustrates the American’s tendency towards expressiveness, the traditional British reserve, and the present growing tendency of the British youths to show their emotions.
But the title, as it is concerned, looks too general and does not provide the readers with hints that would help them predict the exact content. In other words, it is not enough informative and does not reveal the target culture-specific type of the text.

• Tenor of discourse: this text is characterised by the reader anonymity which means that the writer does not know who the reader is, but may assume s/he is a member of a particular group who is interested in knowing about English people’s practices, customs, and common cultural behaviours. This pertains to conclude that the original target audience is supposed unfamiliar with both British and American cultures. Consequently the knowledgeable writer chooses to offer information and provide explanations about the topic using declaratives. Such a use strengthens the writer’s authority over her/his readers. This stands clear through the way s/he distances her/himself from them by avoiding any inclusive language and through adopting an objective description of cultural behaviours. Moreover, the writer does not provide her/his personal comments or even point of view.

• Mode of discourse: this text is of the written to be read type. It consequently includes the required standards of a prototypical written mode; a well structured text constituted by four paragraphs. The latter are organised following a logical order and are related by transition words that serve the main topic of the text. Eg “In contrast to this is the traditional British reserve...” (174)

In “Feelings” the ideational metafunction is determined by the field of exploring the universal theme of feelings from a British-American perspective. It belongs to the type of academic writing as it encloses the objectivity feature which is rendered thanks to the use of declaratives. The latter are used to convey the author’s experience even if no instances of personal opinions are included. Thus, the interpersonal metafunction is considerably absent as the author remains formal and impersonal avoiding interrogatives or personal pronouns that would call for an interaction with the readers. These techniques reinforce the textual metafunction of the text and reinforce its academic formal character mainly that its different parts are coherently structured.

Accordingly, concerning culture teaching this text offers a further instance of the target culture specificities. It gives the EFL learners a chance to get access to the realm of native people’s cultural practices. Moreover, it provides them with hints about the diversity of the target foreign language culture which they may assure unique and homogeneous.

4.2. Reading Texts’ Context of Culture

The other determining aspect of context in Halliday’s social semiotics is that of culture. It is also important in understanding the text’s content. So, we are going to discuss the selected texts’ contexts of culture so as to determine which stances they vehicle; that it is whether it is a local cultural stance, a target foreign cultural stance, or a cross-cultural stance that facilitates intercultural understanding.

To start with, the examination of their cultural components reveals that the six selected reading texts present each a different conception of culture. The latter goes from looking to culture as historical fact, set of shared values, facts and traditions determining stereotypes, practices and behaviours defining a lifestyle, human achievements and scientific discoveries, to social attitudes and behaviours. In addition to this, they can be grouped into three categories translating distinct attitudes towards the type of cultural contents to include in foreign language teaching/learning materials.

The first category consists of materials that use the learners’ local culture as a vehicle to teach the foreign language. An instance of this in \textit{New Prospects} is well illustrated by text 1 which explicitly deals with the Algerian local culture. However, because it considers culture as historical facts, it sets the Algerian local culture in the midst of other cultures in a kind of dialogue highlighting the positive influences of such diversity. Thus, taken from an encyclopaedia the text mentions different ancient...
civilisations such as the prehistoric civilization of the Sahara, the Phoenician, the Roman, and the Ottoman civilizations. So even if concentrating on the learners’ local culture, this text cannot be said to favour enculturation attitudes. On the contrary, it invites the learners to value their culture and see it as part of the human culture.

The second category comprehends materials that favour the foreign target culture as relevant contexts to teach the foreign language. In New Prospects this category is best illustrated by text 3 and text 6, extracted from The Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, and dealing respectively with culture as facts and traditions determining stereotypes and culture as social attitudes and behaviours specific to the target foreign culture as met in British and American societies. Though focussing exclusively on the target culture running the risk of creating in the learners acculturation attitudes justified by a desire to identify with the foreign cultural model, they are useful in breaking some assumed attitudes towards the other’s culture. In fact, by setting the British and the American culture in a contrasting stance the two texts help the learners to accept cultural diversity within the same English culture. This would help them get rid of stereotyped positions by which they view culture as a homogenous body of facts or behaviours common to all English language speaking countries. More important than this, such texts would make the learners review their conceptions of culture and subsequently accept their local cultural diversity looking at it as a fact common to different cultures in the world.

The third category, for its part, relies rather on universal themes representing trans-cultural materials as appropriate means to teach the foreign language within a cross-cultural perspective. Likewise, texts 2, 4, and 5 are the instances which correspond to such materials in New Prospects. These texts respectively look to culture as shared values (ethics), practices and behaviours (lifestyle), and human achievements and scientific discoveries. Therefore, these texts set the learners’ in considerably fair contexts where they can recognise that fundamental human values underlie all cultures even if concrete practical aspects vary significantly from one social group to another. A further advantage of this type of texts is that they give the learners an opportunity to shape their own place (their third space) in the present world that is characterised by a growing globalisation that require above all intercultural competency to achieve cross-cultural understanding.

On the whole it appears that the three types of texts are included in New Prospects though the third category significantly outnumbers the first and the second ones. However, it is worth to note that in illustrating instances there is an explicit focus on the British and American cultures as compared to local culture and to the other English speaking countries which are not at all mentioned in the reading texts. The focus on the British and American cultures incorporated within a universal dimension, in most of the texts, may be interpreted as a way to raise the learners’ awareness about the target culture without getting them lost in the content of discourse. This is actually reinforced by Halliday’s conception of language as embedded in its cultural context and hence sustaining that learning a language implies the systematic learning of its underlying culture.
5. Conclusion

My analysis and discussion of the reading texts included in *New Prospects* in the light of the social semiotic concepts as set by Halliday reveals that the textbook includes cultural components of various types meant to help the learners develop an intercultural communicative competence useful to cross-cultural understanding. The themes of the texts range from culture-specific (dealing either with the local or the target culture) and global ones embodying trans-cultural perspectives. All this pertains to say that learners are offered an opportunity to learn about different cultures what may help them in communicating with English speakers from other backgrounds.

In the end, I would like to remind that my analysis is partial in its scope and not at all comprehensive since it is limited to the reading linguistic texts. I am aware that the reading texts are not the exclusive vehicle of culture in a teaching material that enjoys a rich visual design. So, I suggest further studies that would examine the other components of the textbook to complete my study.

References