

# The Cultural Dimensions Presented in the '*English World 8*' Textbook

Bader S. Dweik

Al-Ahliyya Amman University: Department of English Language and Literature,  
Amman, Jordan

Tel: 962-795-730-325 E-mail: b.dweik@ammanu.edu.jo

Linda A. Kawar

English language instructor, Masqat, Oman

E-mail: kawar2000kawar@yahoo.com

Received: March 20, 2018

Accepted: March 3, 2018

Published: April 30, 2018

doi:10.5296/ijl.v10i2.12862

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v10i2.12862>

## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the cultural content embedded in the 'English World 8' textbook which is adopted by some Jordanian private schools and to highlight the levels of representation assigned to British, World and Arabic cultures. To achieve these goals, the researchers have designed a cultural checklist based on a criterion comprising 19 items representing personal names, places and countries, entertainment, ecology, customs, technology, social behavior, education, history, family, politics, man and woman relationship, communications, transportations, nutrition, sciences, economy, literature and religion. Results show that personal names, places & countries, entertainment and ecology, on the one hand, are the most prevailing cultural aspects in the textbook. On the other hand, religion is not represented at all. Results also reveal that 'English World 8' is heavily loaded with British and World cultures while the Arabic cultural elements are almost lacking.

**Keywords:** Cultural Content, EFL Textbooks, English World, Jordan

## 1. Introduction

Textbooks are essential instruments in EFL classrooms. A good textbook is one of the basic elements which enhance the process and quality of teaching and learning. It provides both teachers and students with the necessary skills that widen their knowledge and fulfill their needs in the classroom and in their practical life. Experts, textbook designers, researchers and even teachers in the educational systems believe that mental, social, cultural and scientific growth of every learner depends on a balanced and appropriate curriculum which covers aspects of their lives and their surroundings. The content of the textbooks being chosen in certain curricula should contain the most essential executive policy for achieving the targets of every educational system.

In Jordan, educational policies stipulate that all public schools have to teach a unified EFL curriculum starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and ending with 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Ministry of Education, 1999). On the other hand, some private schools have decided to adopt *English World "8"* textbook for teaching English as a second language. The purpose of this new textbook is to improve the quality of teaching and develop the student's skills at a level that enables them to use the English language and express themselves independently.

English World "8" includes a pupil's book, a workbook, a teacher's guide; two stories, a dictionary, a DVD-Rom and an audio. This series is written by Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren and published by Macmillan Education in 2012.

As far as culture is concerned, it has been defined by Newmark (1988 p. 302) as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". However, it is meant in this research to refer to the cultural elements that are illustrated linguistically and non-linguistically in English World "8", i.e. food, dressing and how people spend their leisure time, marriage, customs, behavior, ceremonies, music and arts, history, politics, literature, science, etc.

The study aims to investigate the cultural content embedded in the English World "8" which is adopted by some Jordanian private schools and to examine the levels of representation of British, world and Arabic cultures in the textbook. To achieve these goals, the study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What cultural dimensions are presented in English World "8" pupil's book?
2. What are the levels of representation assigned to British culture, world culture and Arabic culture?

## 2. Review of Literature

According to Brown (1994), language reflects and shapes culture. It is the symbolic representation of people's historical background, perception to life and their ways of living and thinking. Without culture, language would be dead and without language culture, would have no shape. Therefore, language and culture are closely connected and separating one from the other would cause a loss of their significance.

Dweik (2000) believes that culture is about what people share and about their differences with others. These differences can be referred to many factors such as age, race, gender, social class, generation, life experiences, and communicational styles. Such differences may hinder communication unless people try to find some sort of understanding. Furthermore, Kramersch (1998) notes that these understandings and practices are loosely bounded, constantly changing and subjectively experienced. Both Kramersch (1998) and Phillips (2003), assert that culture is the understanding and practices that are shared within groups of people.

According to Pulverness (2003), it is clear that language and cultures have an intimate relationship and that one cannot learn a language without learning culture. Similarly, Seelye (1993), stated that “The study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice versa”. (p. 22)

Moreover, Aliakbari (2004) conducted a study to investigate the place of culture in ELT at high school level and the way of addressing the culture in ELT in Iran. The study also investigated textbooks’ contribution to the improvement of students’ intercultural competence. The researcher analyzed four English textbooks entitled English Book One, English Book Two, English Book Three and English Book Four. The analysis was based upon the amount and kind of presentation given to various target language speaking countries or groups in the textbooks. Findings revealed that the cultural content in the ELT textbooks used in Iran was very limited the thing that did not help to develop cultural understanding and intercultural competence.

Genc & Bada (2005) emphasize that teaching a language seems senseless if students know nothing about who speak the target language or even the country where the target language is being spoken. They describe teaching a language apart from its culture as inaccurate and incomplete.

Jafar (2006) investigated the foreign cultural dimensions compared to the Arabic dimensions in English textbooks taught at public schools in Jordan. The researcher adopted the Action Pack series from 1-6 and analyzed its cultural content. The results revealed that the foreign dimensions had scored 76%, while the Arabic dimensions had scored 24%. As a result the researcher recommended that there should be a balance between the Arabic culture and the foreign culture to enable students to relate English to real life.

Furthermore, Ababneh (2007) examined the content of Jordan *Opportunities* series and explored teachers’ and supervisors’ opinions concerning them. He built up an eighty-seven-item questionnaire to be filled out by the chosen sample which comprised eighty EFL teachers and eight supervisors in Irbid’s first, second and third education directorates. The researcher inferred that the consideration of culture was clear in comparing cultures, quotes and unquote and culture corner dimensions. All citations in quote and unquote section were taken from well-known persons of the foreign culture, though in comparing cultures section, there was a concentration on Arab and Islamic culture like contrasting Ramadan in Morocco and Jordan. Culture corner section was dedicated to foreign cultures, i.e, Scotland and Britain. An alternate finding of the study was that every module included another new topic which was efficiently organized.

Al-Jadiriy , Al Madanat & Dweik (2009) investigated the extent to which the cultural dimensions were included in the *Enterprise* series textbook “4” and whether they matched the learner’s objectives. To achieve the study purpose, the *Enterprise* “4” series textbooks were chosen as a sample for the study and researchers developed nine-question checklist covering the objective domain as a research instrument bearing in mind international ,regional and national evaluative criteria. The results showed that the textbooks were heavily loaded with dimensions of the target cultures but lacking completely the dimensions of the Arabic learner’s culture.

Lee (2009) examined the included cultural dimensions in eleven EFL conversation textbooks used in Korea. In his study, the researcher used content analysis technique based upon models conceptualized by Paige et al and Lee who all encouraged integrating language and culture teaching / learning. The results showed that the investigated textbooks revealed a strong tendency to include big “C” target-culture learning such as of facts and statistics in the fields of arts, history and customs related to USA without any further explication of the small “c” domain of a target culture.

Dweik and Al-Sayyed (2015) investigated the cultural aspects in Action Pack 12. They developed a cultural checklist. The study revealed that Action pack 12 was heavily loaded with cultural aspects related to Arabic and international cultures followed by British culture.

### 3. Methodology

This research adopts an analytical quantitative approach where percentages are used in the analysis and estimates the availability of cultural items in the textbook. The Sample of the study consists of *English World* “8” pupils’ book for 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

To achieve the purposes of the study, the researchers used a cultural checklist based on 19 items aiming to examine the cultural dimensions in *English World* “8” pupils’ book including the following sub-cultural dimensions: *Personal Names, Places and Countries, Entertaining, Ecology, Customs, Technology, Social Behavior, Education, History, Family, Politics, Man & Woman Relationship, Communication, Transportation, Nutrition, Science, Economy, Literature* in addition to *Religion*. The cultural checklist is based on previous works, i.e, those of Dweik and Al- Sayyed (2015), Shatanawi (2005 and 2009), Newmark (1988) with some extra cultural categories that are added by the researchers.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Results of Chart (1) indicate that *Personal Names, Places & Countries* have scored the highest percentages, 13.81%, 12.84%, among other cultural dimensions. Clearly, *Entertaining* and *Ecology* have also scored 11.28% & 10.7% respectively. Interestingly, *Politics, Man & Woman Relationship* and *Communication* share the same percentages of 3.11%. *Science, Economy* and *Literature* have scored low percentages (1.75%, 0.78% and 0.58% respectively) among the other cultural dimensions. It is observed that *Religion* is completely ignored in this book.

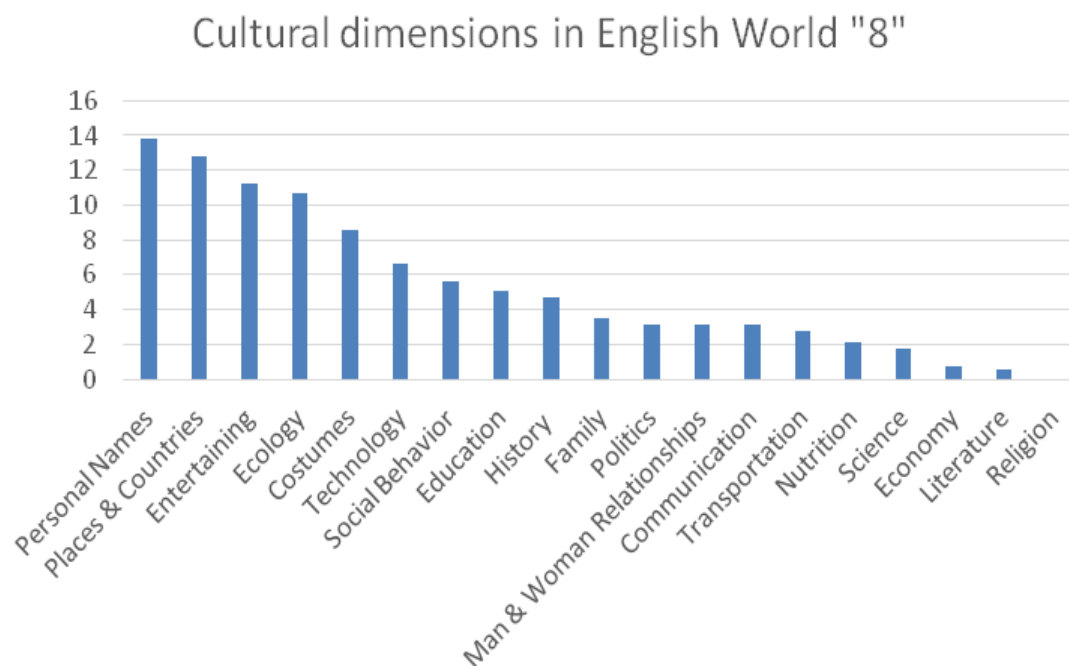


Chart 1. Distribution of the cultural dimensions in English World "8"

Below are examples extracted from English World "8" for each of the 19 cultural dimensions:

1. **Personal Names:** This dimension refers to male and female first names or nicknames.

*"Laura: I heard you whispering to Sergei. You seemed pretty excited."*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.23)

2. **Places & Countries:** This dimension refers to names of countries and places . (*USA, UK (Grand Palace), Egypt, Canada (Quebec), India and Australia*)

( Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, pp. 37,89 and 98)

3. **Entertaining:** It is concerned with entertaining activities, popular sports, entertaining programs, touristic and entertaining places, traditional music, famous singers, actors and actresses, famous paintings and painters in addition to artistic productions such as films and plays.

*"Jack remembers when he was 13 years old was picked as a member of swimming team for the swimming trophy".*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 65)

4. **Ecology:** It refers to environments of different places besides the nature and the animals which are lived in.

(*Niagara Falls in Canada, Ayer's Rock in Australia, Wastwater in England*)

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, pp. 35,89)

5. **Costumes:** This dimension is related to traditional dresses, men's and women's dresses, casual clothes, formal clothes and costumes of occasions such as marriages and funerals.

*"We enjoyed finding out about the lives of First Nation people. We have traditional clothing in Kenya. I'm sending you a photo of my aunt wearing traditional beadwork".*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 99)

6. **Technology:** This dimension refers to items related to website usage, emails, smart devices such as cell phones, laptops.

*“Welcome to the Global link website. We hope you enjoy looking at everything on the site and reading the pages”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 118)

*“Laura opened her laptop and typed in the web address. Immediately, the Global Youth Link home page filled the screen”.*

7. **Social Behavior:** This dimension refers to items related to greetings and partings' expressions, acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

*Prof B: “Hello, everyone. Come in, sit down and take one of the leaflets. Tell me, have you enjoyed your week in New York”?*

*Holly: “Yes we have”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 13)

8. **Education:** It refers to items related to educational systems, kinds of schools, school subjects, university subjects and grading system.

*“I’m having a terrible weekend. At school on Monday morning I’ve got to give a presentation. I’ll be standing at the front of the class.”*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 112)

*“Many children in Africa cannot go to school. Either their parents are too poor to pay or there is no school for them to go”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.119)

9. **History:** This dimension refers to items related to major historical events in the country with reference to the past or the present time.

*“The Grand Palace was built by king Rama in 1782”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.38)

10. **Family:** It refers to family gatherings, parties and celebrations and family relations.

*Ross: “What’s the matter, Laura? You look really fed up”. Laura: “I’ve had a terrible row with Mum and Dad. They want me to stop working on the project”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.63)

11. **Politics:** It includes items that give information about political system of governments in the past or the present, leaderships in the country, flags, governments and relations with other countries.

*“Luke Terry has flown to visit his father through the airport’s immigration control, his passport was taken away, a security officer asked him to open his suitcase.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 68)

12. **Man-Woman Relationship:** It refers to the role of woman & man and equality between man & woman.

*“They met Dr Nasser, the international coordinator, from Egypt and GeorgiDollidze, a young website designer from Georgia.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 4)

13. **Communication:** It refers to kinds of formal, informal, written and oral communication through cell phones, meetings, email..

*“Laura: Hang on a sec. That’s my phone. I’ve got a text”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.43)

*“One teacher wondered if text messaging was having a bad effect on her pupil’s spelling. One person said that it was not just a teenage craze. He wondered how business people had ever managed without it.”*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.82)

14. **Transportation:** It refers to public transportations such as taxis, buses, trains..

*“When does the train leave tomorrow? “It leaves at nine o’clock”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.43)

15. **Nutrition:** This includes items that are related to famous dishes, hot and soft drinks, food recipes and eating habits.

*“Holly always eats a good breakfast”.*

*“At school Jack has a sandwich and a chocolate bar for lunch”*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 69)

16. **Science:** Items that are related to different fields of science, famous scientists, scholars, inventors and explorers, as well as biographies.

*“Do stories about space make science more interesting”?*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.47)

*“Seven tenth of the Earth is water”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p.50)

17. **Economy:** Items related to names of banks, currency, as well as buying and selling goods.

18. **Literature:** Items that are related to different fields of literature, famous poets, dramatists and playwrights.

*“A group of visitors is enjoying a tour of the globe theatre in London.”*

*“In Shakespeare’s days rich people stood to watch the plays”.*

(Mary Bowen, Liz Hocking and Wendy Wren, 2012, p. 56)

19. **Religion:** It refers to religious practices, ceremonies, holidays, places of worship and rituals.

The levels of representation of the above mentioned cultural dimensions are presented in Table (1) below as per their assignment to British, world and Arabic cultures

Table (1). Total Percentages of Cultural Dimensions in *English World “8”*

| Cultural Dimensions           | Percentages of Cultural Dimensions |       |        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|--------|
|                               | British                            | World | Arabic |
|                               | %                                  | %     | %      |
| <b>Personal Names</b>         | 63.4                               | 26.8  | 9.9    |
| <b>Places &amp; Countries</b> | 27.3                               | 68.2  | 4.5    |
| <b>Entertaining</b>           | 37.9                               | 53.4  | 3.4    |
| <b>Ecology</b>                | 21.8                               | 70.9  | 5.5    |
| <b>Costumes</b>               | 79.5                               | 15.9  | 2.3    |
| <b>Technology</b>             | 91.2                               | 8.8   | 0      |
| <b>Social Behavior</b>        | 100                                | 0     | 0      |
| <b>Education</b>              | 96.2                               | 3.8   | 0      |

|                                      |       |       |     |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>History</b>                       | 8.3   | 83.3  | 8.3 |
| <b>Family</b>                        | 83.3  | 16.7  | 0   |
| <b>Politics</b>                      | 43.8  | 50    | 6.3 |
| <b>Man &amp; Woman Relationships</b> | 75    | 25    | 0   |
| <b>Communication</b>                 | 93.8  | 6.3   | 0   |
| <b>Transportation</b>                | 57.1  | 35.7  | 0   |
| <b>Nutrition</b>                     | 72.7  | 27.3  | 0   |
| <b>Science</b>                       | 100   | 0     | 0   |
| <b>Economy</b>                       | 100   | 0     | 0   |
| <b>Literature</b>                    | 100   | 0     | 0   |
| <b>Religion</b>                      | 0     | 0     | 0   |
| <b>Total</b>                         | 58.37 | 36.77 | 3.7 |

Results of analyzing *English World “8”* have revealed three cultural dimensions embedded in this textbook starting with British culture, World cultures and ending by Arabic culture. The analysis uncovered the percentages of each cultural dimension as follows; the British cultural dimension has scored (58.37), the World cultures (36.77) followed by the Arabic culture (3.7), which shows that this textbook has been heavily loaded with the British culture while the presence of Arabic culture seemed to have nothing to be mentioned.

Arabic culture has scored 3.7% of the cultural dimensions in this textbook. This actually supported the findings of Jafar (2006) who investigated the foreign cultural dimensions in *Action Pack* series from (1 to 6) and found that foreign cultural dimensions had scored 76%, while the Arabic dimensions had scored 24%. As a result, the researcher recommended that there should be a balance between the Arabic culture and the foreign culture to enable students to relate English to real life. This means that this textbook was not carried out to be exposed to Arabian societies. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that this textbook needed to be evaluated and its cultural contents needed to be analyzed before being exposed to learners.

It is noticed that the results regarding the percentage given to British culture agree with the results of Lee (2009) who pointed out that these textbooks have yielded a high percentage to the target culture with some variations and differences to the percentages given to the source and world cultures.

Meanwhile the findings of this study were not in agreement with Ababneh (2007) who inferred that the inclusion of British culture, Arabic culture and foreign culture were clearly shown in Jordan *Opportunities* series. The findings of the current study supported the results of Al-Jadiry, Al Madanat & Dweik (2009) who revealed that *Enterprise* textbook “4” was heavily loaded with dimensions of the target cultures but lacking completely the dimensions of the Arabic learner’s culture.

First names in this textbook seemed to have the highest percentage of British culture (63.4%) followed by World culture (26.8%) and then Arabic culture (9.9%). Arabic names beside World names were highly spread. That is to say, if students are exposed to Arabic names,



they will face no difficulty in distinguishing names of males or females. On the contrary, if non-Arabic names are presented, students will face a problem in differentiating between feminine and masculine nouns which is a waste of time in their learning process.

Obviously, World and British cultures that indicate *Entertainment, Places & Countries* seemed to have a high percentage in the textbook. This means that teaching these dimensions is very important because it helps students to learn about countries and places and enables them to appreciate different cultures. Furthermore, results indicated that the historical dimension was mainly directed towards World cultures which seemed to have the highest percentage compared with the British and the Arabic cultures. This might refer to the fact that knowing about World cultures will give students a much more comprehensive picture of more than one country or culture.

*Man & Woman Relationship, Transportation, and Nutrition* have scored a high percentage of British culture followed by World cultures. It is worth mentioning that Arabic culture was ignored. Again, knowing about various World cultures is much more comprehensive than knowing about one culture. On the other hand, *Economy, Science, and Literature* dimensions scored a low percentage in this textbook. This shows the textbook concentrated to give general information to the learners without interfering the learners' values or their way of thinking.

The findings in the current study revealed that *Social Behavior* has scored a high percentage in British culture, but it seemed to fail in orienting students about World and Arabic cultures. This dimension is considered a very important for students' life since it helps to understand how people should behave with others and will help them avoid cultural shock. What might be considered an acceptable behavior in certain cultures might not be acceptable in Arabic culture and vice versa.

Results also proved that this textbook has ignored the religious dimension per because it is a sensitive issue.

## 5. Conclusions

An analysis of the overall results of the study illustrated that *English World 8* is heavily loaded with cultural dimensions related to the British culture and the World cultures. These cultures have highlighted the following dimensions: Personal names, places and countries, entertainment, ecology, customs, technology, social behavior, education, history, family, politics, man & woman relationship, communication, transportation, nutrition, science, economy, literature in addition to religion. Analysis of the cultural dimensions included in the textbook indicated that scanty information was related to Arabic culture.

## References

Ababneh, J. (2007). Analyzing the content of "Jordan Opportunities" for the basic stage Jordanian students and investigating teachers' and students' opinions. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Amman Arab University for Graduate Studies, Amman: Jordan.

- Aliakbari, M. (2004). The place of culture in the Iranian ELT textbooks in high school level. Paper presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics Conference, Seoul, Korea.
- Al-Jadiry, A., Al Madanat, H., & Dweik, B. (2009). Evaluating enterprise series textbooks from a cultural perspective based on the objective domain. *ATLAS*, 4(1), 78-123.
- Bowen, M., Hocking, L., & Wren, W. (2012). *English World*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Brown, H., (1994). *Principles of learning and teaching*. USA: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Dweik, B. (2000). Bilingualism and the problem of linguistic and cultural interference. In Alharbi, L and Azer, H. (Eds.), *Arabic Language and Culture in Borderless World*. Kuwait University.
- Dweik, B. & Al-Sayyed, S. (2015). Analyzing the cultural content of Action Pack 12. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 3(2), 1-28.
- Genc, B., & Bada, E. (2005) .Culture in language learning and teaching. *The Reading Matrix*, 5(1), 73-84.
- Jafar, F. (2006). The foreign cultural aspects embedded in the English textbooks of the basic stage in Jordan. *Jordan Journal of Educational Sciences*, 2(3), 201-207.
- Kramersch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, K-Y. (2009). Treating culture: What 11 high school EFL conversation textbooks in South Korea do? *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 8(1), 76-96.
- Newmark, P.(1988).*A textbook of translation*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Phillips, JK. (2003). National standards for foreign language learning. In D. L. Lange & R. M. Paige (Eds.), *Culture as the core: Perspectives on culture in second language learning* (pp. 161-171). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Pulverness, A. (2003). Distinction and dichotomies: Culture free, Culture Bound. Retrieved from <http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/forum/distanddich.htm>
- Seelye, H. (1993). *Teaching culture: Strategies for inter-cultural communication*, (3<sup>rd</sup>ed). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3106540>
- Shatnawi, M. (2005). *The cultural dimension in TEFL: A case study of the cutting edge series*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Yarmouk University, Irbid: Jordan.
- Shatnawi, A. (2009). *An evaluation of the cultural aspects in “Mission 1” and students’ attitudes towards them*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Yarmouk University, Irbid: Jordan.

### **Authors**

Bader Dweik is currently a faculty member at Al-Ahliyya Amman University. He is a former Dean of Scientific Research and a professor of English Linguistics. He has a distinguished career in the United States and many Arab universities. His research interests and publications are in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and translation.

Linda A. Kawar holds an MA degree in English Language and Literature from Jordan. Her research interests are in English language teaching, culture and language in society.

### **Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)