USE OF PARALEL TEXTS:
TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL TEACHING MATERIALS TO OVERCOME CULTURAL DIFFERENCES PERSE

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1.Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Teaching English in many Arab universities, I have had the opportunity to notice that many of my students usually tend to transfer to English the formulaic expressions used in Arabic. This, in fact, influences negatively their use of English and makes them produce sometimes rather obscure chunks of words. Lado (1957: 2) has explained this process in his well-known dictum:

>"individuals tend to transfer the forms
>and meanings and distribution of forms
>and meanings of their native language and
>culture to the second language and culture."

This problem, however, can be generalized to the majority of Arab speaking learners of English (cf. For instance, investigations carried out by Kaplan 1966, Dudley-Evans and Swales 1980, Koch 1981, Holes 1984, Kharma and Hajjaj 1989, Mohammad 1997). Such a situation is attributable to a number of factors, the most prominent of which are differences in cultures which constrain the use of English and Arabic.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to suggest the use of English/ Arabic Parallel Texts (henceforth PT) as teaching materials within communicative methodological considerations in order to help Arab learners of English towards successful cross-cultural encounters rather than misunderstanding. In other words, this is an attempt to help the learners overcome cultural differences per se by exposing them to English/ Arabic PT which exhibit social-related formulaic expressions. In addition, the PT materials will encourage " positive

2. PT should be authentic texts and they should have comparable conventions of text constituents.
3. PT should have a similar subject matter and should render a similar message.

Based on the above observations, I can say that PT are authentic texts in two languages or more having similar subject and reflecting similar communicative function.

2.2 Formulaic Expressions

Coulmas (1981: 2) defines formulaic expressions as, " highly conventionalized pre-patterned expressions whose occurrence is tied to more or less standardized communicative situations". This definition of formulaic Expressions seems accurate for my purpose in this study.

Formulaic expressions are either completely frozen or relatively free (cf. Thomas 1989). The first is that kind of expression which does not accept any change within its constituents, for example (السلام عليكـم) " peace be upon you ". The second is that expression which accepts changes within its constituents, for example (كيف حالك) " How are you?" can also be said (كيف الدنيا معاك) " How is life going with you" or (كيف امورك) " How are things going with you?".

However, the concept of formulaic expressions seem to be universal. Tannen and Oztek (1981) describe such expressions that occur in Turkish and Greek. Ferguson (1989) in Syrian dialect, Albert (1972) in Burundi and Bentahila and Davis (1989) in English and Moroccan Arabic. All these studies have shown that these expressions have strong links with the social – cultural background of the people and therefore very important in revealing how certain values are attached to a certain culture. For example, to transfer the Arabic formulaic expression (زيد جم الرمـاد) into English, we have two possibilities. The first one is literal translation which results " negative transfer " (Zaydun has a lot of ashes). It is obvious that the learner here has not taken the Arabic cultural aspects into consideration therefore this method of transfer is misleading and obscure . The second possibility is to take into account the cultural background of the Arabs then it is

transferred into (Zaydun is generous). Here the language learner has known that the person who has a lot of ashes in the Arab world is the person who always cooks for his guests and visitors, therefore he is a generous person. This transfer of the expression is meaningful and it is very close to reality, therefore it can be called " positive transfer ".

3. Methodological Considerations

In order for me to present the teaching materials I am suggesting, I think it is important to mention here the following important points which are based on communicative methodology.

3.1 View Towards Language

The first methodological consideration to be pin pointed is regarding the nature of language. I base my opinion on the view that regards language a system for the expression of meaning and its main job is to create social relations between people. In other words, language is viewed here as one necessary vehicle for communication. I say one vehicle because communication can also be achieved through non-coded communication such as facial expressions, movements of hands, etc.

Since language is conceived of as a necessary attribute for communication then language teaching must aim at enabling the learners obtain communicative competence. This competence, in my view, implies "linguistic competence" and "pragmatic competence". The first is related to the capacity for producing grammatical rules and the second is related to the extralinguistic factors such as: context, culture and social rules which govern the language.

As for foreign language learners, particularly adults, who usually come to the class carrying their pragmatic knowledge experience of life, cognitive abilities and their first language I think it is extremely important to show them the way formulaic expressions are used in the foreign language and how this is different from that of the first language. This I believe, will have its positive influence on the way they receive and produce texts appropriately in the foreign language.

3.2 Theory of language Learning

The use of the PT I am suggesting implies three major points: the first one is the use of the mother tongue as a building block to acquire the

foreign language. The second one is the conscious analysis of the formulaic expressions in question and the third is the discussion of the results gained from the analysis for the purpose of producing appropriate texts.

All these points, in fact, can find a proper place in modern trends in cognitive psychology and communication theories. The first one, which is the use of the mother tongue, can be justified following the view which indicates that new information is usually interpreted in relation to what is already known (old information). Relating this to language learning I can say that the learner attempts to interpret the foreign language (new knowledge) in the light of the first language (old information). If this is the case we can conceive of FL learning as extension to an old experience. Widdowson (1979:11) confirms this saying:

> " The process of learning a second Language
> should be presented not as the acquisition
> of new knowledge and experience, but as
> an extension or alternative realization of
> what the learners already know."

It is, thus, the crucial role which the mother tongue plays which provides the cognitive support for those who attempt to use PT in language teaching.

The Second main point, which is the conscious analysis of the English and Arabic formulaic expressions, is another activity which can be seen in cognitive perspective. To pin point the formulae in the PT and relate them to their cultural origin is a highly analytical exercise i.e. a problem-solving task in which the learners are encouraged to use and activate their cognitive abilities and learning strategies to see for themselves the differences in the form and use of formulaic expressions in both languages, which will in turn facilitate learning of the foreign language on the part of the learner.

The third point which is the discussion of the results gained from the analysis by group members in the classroom, has also a psychological basis. Barnes (1976) indicates that collaborative thought and discussion among group members involves a complex mix of social learning, affective factors and cognitive skills which can develop only gradually and as a result of experience of group learning.

3.3 Syllabus

According to the main objectives of this study, the syllabus for the PT materials comprises English and Arabic PT of various types and genres such as obituaries, congratulation cards, acknowledgements, etc. Such PT can be selected in accordance with the learner's interests and on-going needs of the learners while the course is proceeding. Moreover, the learners can participate in negotiating whatever texts they want with the teacher to the extent that they can select the PT by themselves while the course is in progress. This dynamic interaction between learners, teachers and materials is actually an essential part of the process oriented syllabus (see Brumfit 1979:94).

Our syllabus, then, is designed in terms of meaningful samples of language in use i.e. PT, which can motivate personal and group interaction. I believe that through the provision of such authentic tasks (PT) and with an emphasis on the procedure; which encourages interaction, analysis to see the differences in the use of formulaic expressions in English and Arabic PT and giving opportunities to students to write; we can enable the learners to write Proper English texts.

3.4 Types of Learning and Teaching Activities

The main concern of the use of PT materials is to enable the learners to communicate effectively in writing. To fulfil this task we have to find alternative types of learning and teaching activities other than the traditional situation of the teacher facing his students addressing them on matters that may not be communicatively genuine for them. Such alternative activities require to view teaching and learning as social activities implying role relationship between the teacher and learners and among learners themselves.

As far as we are concerned, we adopt the group work technique in which the learners inside the classroom work together in small groups or in pairs on the envisaged texts. We believe that group work activity can be considered as a simplification of " reality" where people communicate naturally. The group work activity would also increase the learners' motivation, because it encourages them to state their personal views and argue in favor of what they think is right. Besides, group work means that the learners can benefit from each other skills and strategies which will increase their interest in learning.

3.5 The roles of the Teachers and Learners

We mentioned earlier that in dealing with the PT materials we adopt classroom activities that   encourage group work and cooperation among the members of the class. This implies a different role for the learner than just repeating drills or doing some sentence-based exercises by himself only. The learner here is given the responsibility of participating in reading the PT and discussing the differences as far as the formulaic expressions are concerned. In addition, he is also given the role of being a writer when he is producing a text and trying to establish contact with the reader in order to get his massage across.

Generally speaking, the learner is   not seen as a passive vessel to be filled with information, but as an active member of the group bringing his knowledge of the world, culture, native language, etc. to the materials he is dealing with so as to promote learning.

As for the teacher, he is   considered a facilitator trying to create the appropriate context for learning to take place. The teacher is also given the role of a guide trying to direct his learners to the right strategies of learning rather than a controller of the classroom.

3.5 Classroom Techniques

In dealing with the PT inside the classroom, the following techniques are suggested.

1. Two PT (English and Arabic) are handed over to the learners who are organized in small groups.
2. In small groups the learners work together to read the texts then analyze and compare the formulaic expressions in both texts.
3. After discussing the differences and similarities of the formulaic expressions, the learners hand over the texts to the teacher.
4. In small groups they write in English on a transparency, which is distributed by the teacher, a text according to the objective of the exercise.
5. After finishing writing, the teacher displays what the groups have written on an overhead projector so as to be discussed by other groups in the classroom.
6. Finally, a homework exercise is given to the learners.

This is as much as we wish to say on the presentation of the PT materials. In the next section we will realize our ideas into teaching

materials within the methodological considerations already mentioned.

4. Sample Materials

Before we present our materials, it is important to emphasize the following points.

1. The materials are designed to suit intermediate and high-intermediate level Arab learners of English who start their study in the colleges of Humanities and Education / University of Qatar.

2. Grading of the authentic PT is from simple to difficult and from short to long.

3. The formulaic expressions are presented in context, i.e. PT in order to promote writing as an essential part of natural communication.

4. The materials are varied and authentic. They have been collected from real world (Birthday cards, Personal letters, Letters written to newspapers) They deal with up to date topics which reflect the needs and interests of the learners.

5. The materials are presented within an interactive and a communicative lay out which is based on a combination of individual work, group work and class work to help the learners communicate naturally between themselves.

6. The writing activity is presented in an integrative way, that is there is a close relationship between the writing activity and other types of language learning activities such as reading comprehension and group discussion.

7. The language used in the presentation of the tasks is expected to raise the standard of the learners to an advanced level and help them communicate naturally in writing.

8. The tasks will enable the learners to carry out a contrastive analysis and see for themselves how formulaic expressions are used in English and Arabic and how cultural differences influences their use. The background knowledge of the learners (schemata) plays an important role in this respect because without it learners won't be able to compare the use of these formulaic expressions . So the schemata of the learners is a powerful element which facilitates contrastive analysis. The tasks will also enable the learners to

avoid negative transfer and encourage them to produce English texts appropriately.

In the following section the materials are tabulated in the form of tasks.

Task 1

A. Read the following texts then discuss these points:
1. Where are such texts usually found?
2. Who are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. What cultural aspects do the texts show? Support your answers with examples (formulaic expressions from the texts.

Arabic Text

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
نهديكم أطيب التمنيات والتهاني
وألف مبروك
بمناسبة حلول عيد الفطر المبارك
نسأل الله سبحانه وتعالى
أن يعيده عليكم وعلينا باليمن والبركة

English Text

Merry X Mas & Happy New Year	Wishing You Happiness Now and Through Out The Year Ahead

B. Hand the texts to the teacher after you finish your discussion.
C. In small groups, write out on OHP transparency a greetings card to an English friend for Easter.
D. Discuss what the groups have written as the teacher displays the texts on the OHP.
E. Homework: Write a congratulation card to an English Friend who has just passed an important examination.

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Task 2

A. Read the following texts then in small groups discuss these points:
1. Where could you normally find these texts?
2. Who are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. What Cultural aspects do these texts display? Support your answers with formulaic expressions from the texts.

Arabic Text

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم يسرنا أن نتقدم بأسمى التبريكات وأحر التهاني بمناسبة عيد ميلادكم سائلين الله تعالى أن يعيده عليكم بالأفراح والمسرات أنه نعم المولى ونعم النصير	كل سنة وأنت طيب ألف مبروك عساكم من عوادة

English Text

Best Wishes On Your BIRTHDAY	**There couldn't be A better time To wish you all the best Than on this Very special day That stands out from the best. HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

B. Give the texts back to the teacher when you finish your discussion.
C. In small groups, write out on OHP transparency a birthday card to a dear friend of yours.
D. Discuss what the other groups have written as the teacher displays them on the OHP.
E. Homework: Write a birthday card to your English teacher.

Task 3

A. read the following texts then discuss in small groups these points:
1. Where would you find such texts?

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2. Who are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. What cultural differences do the texts display? Support your
   answer with formulaic expressions from the texts.

Arabic Text

> مواليد
> رزق السيد بشار لطيف المصري وعقيلته الفاضلة
> بمولودة أسمياها " هيا "، وبهذه المناسبة نتقدم بأسمى التهاني
> سائلين المولى عز وجل أن يجعلها من أبناء السعادة

English Texts

> **Births**
>
> **It's a Girl**
>
> **TAYLOR**
> **To Wendy**
> **And Gray**
> **Congratulations on the birth of their beautiful**
> **Baby daughter LINZA JAYNE, born 9 March.**
>
> **1999**
>
> **All Our Love From Mum and Dad**

B. Give the texts back to the teacher when you finish your discussion.
C. In small group, Write out on OHP transparency a birth text of a
   boy in an English newspaper.
D. Discuss the texts written by the groups as the teacher displays
   them on OHP.
E. Homework: A couple you know very well have just had a baby
   boy. Write a birth text to the newspaper on this occasion.

Task 4

A. Read the following texts then discuss in small groups these points:
1. Where could you normally find these texts?
2. Who are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. In what way do the g traditions in the Arab countries and England differ? Support your view with formulaic expressions from the texts.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
حفلة زفاف
يتشرف السيد جميل الخياط بدعوتكم لحضور حفلة زفاف
ولده " سعد " على كريمة السيد جميل النجار في فندق
الزهور وفي تمام الساعة الخامسة مساء من يوم
الخميس الموافق ٣ مارس.
وبحضوركم تتم الأفراح

English Text

Mr. & Mrs. Hunter

**Request the pleasure of your
Company for the marriage of their
Daughter Fiona to John Whitfield on
14th Feb. 1999 at St. Martin church and
There after at Camberwell Community Centre**

(R.S.V.P.)

**Mr. & Mrs. Hunter
191 Eccles Old Road
Salford M.6**

B. After you finish your discussion give back the texts to the teacher.
C. In small groups, write out on OHP transparency an invitation card to a wedding in English.
D. Discuss what other groups have written as the teacher displays the texts on the OHP.
E. Homework: Write another invitation card in English.

Task 5

A. Read these texts then discuss the following points with your group members.
   1. Where do you think these texts are normally found?
   2. Who do you think are the participants?
   3. What is the purpose of each text?
   4. What cultural aspects do the texts show? How do they differ? Support your view with evidence (formulaic expressions) from the texts.

Arabic Text

شكر

أنا المواطن علي محمد جاسم من مدينة عمان أتقدم بخالص الشكر وعظيم الامتنان لإدارة وأطباء مستشفى اليرموك وخاصة للدكتور الفاضل عبد الهادي الدباغ أخصائس المجاري البولية على ما أولاه من عناية فائقة لولدي " فراس " حيث من الله عليه بالشفاء. فبارك الله بجهوده وجهود العاملين في المستشفى

English Text

Acknowledgements

Mrs. Jemima Renwick, MBE, RGN, RMN, Son Stanley and Daughter-in-law Elizabeth, would like to make special mention of the dedicated professionalism and caring concern shown by the consultants and entire staff of the Princess Grace Hospital, Merylebone, throughout my dear Husband Stanley's illness. Their many acts of kindness will never be forgotten by us and all those who visited Stanley in Hospital.

B. When you finish your discussion, give back the texts to the teacher.

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C. In small groups write out on OHP transparency an acknowledgement text in English thanking hospital staff and doctors for their care they showed throughout your father's illness.

D. Discuss what other groups have written as the teacher displays their texts on OHP.

E. Homework: Write an acknowledgement text to an English newspaper thanking the director and staff of Day Knight Advertising Agency for their help to you in your new project.

Task 6

A. Read the following texts then in small groups discuss these points.
1. Where are such texts normally found?
2. Who are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. What cultural differences do they display? Support your view with formulaic expressions from the texts.

Arabic Text

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الأخ العزيز أبو خالد   المحترم

أهديك خالص تحياتي الأخوية وأرجو لك والعائلة الكريمة دوام الصحــة والعافيــة داعيا العلي القدير أن يبعد عنكم كل مكروه. أنا والعائلة والأولاد بخير ولا يهمنا ســوي فراقكم الغالي علينا.

أخي : بعد أيام تطل علينا عطلة نصف السنة الدراسية وهي مناسبة جيدة لكي نلتقي بكم ويلتقي الأولاد ليمرحوا ويفرحوا خصوصا والربيع على الأبواب.

أخي: أننا نتطلع إلى قدومكم فيرجى إعلامنا عن موعد ذلك ليتسنى لنا استقبالكم ســواء كان ذلك في المطار أو في البيت إن كنت قادم في سيارتك.

وختاما أتمنى لكم وللعائلة والأولاد جميعا دوام الصحة والعافيـــة والســـعادة الدائمــة. ومع تحياتي وتحيات الأولاد.

أخوك
محمد سالم
عمان: ١٩٩٩/٣/٣م

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English Text

<div align="right">21 Hillside Drive
Pendlebury
Swinton</div>

Dear Tom,

Sorry to be so long in writing to you but things have been a bit hectic here. How are you and the family? Every one here is well and sends their best wishes. Its good to know that you are back in Britain for some time.

Betty and I were wondering if you would like to come over next weelend. There is plenty of room for you all as you know. It would be good to see you and have a long talk after such a long time. Anyway give us a ring if you can make it. I can meet you at the airport if you are coming by air.

Please excuse this short note. I must get this in the post.

<div align="center">Best wishes from</div>

<div align="center">Stephen, Mark and Betty</div>

B. Give the texts back to the teacher when you finish your discussion.
C. In small groups, write out on OHP transparency a friendly letter to an English friend inviting him to visit you during the summer holidays.
D. Discuss other group's texts as the teacher displays them on the OHP.
E. Homework: Write a letter to an English friend thanking him for a recent visit.

Task 7
Read the following texts then discuss with group members the following points.
1. Where do you think these texts are normally found?

2. Who do you think are the participants?
3. What is the purpose of each text?
4. What cultural aspects do the texts show? Support your view with formulaic expressions from the texts.

Arabic Text

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

شكر على تعاز

علي حسن يوسف

يتقدم بجزيل الشكر وعظيم الامتنان

لكل من تفضل بمواساته بوفاة المرحوم

والـــــده

حسن يوسف

سواء كان ذلك في الحضور شخصيا

أو تليفونيا أو برقيا

سائلا الله عز وجل أن لا يريهم

مكروها بعزيز لديهم

إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون

English Text

WATTON. _____ Mrs Mary Watton desires to express her sincere thanks to all relatives, friends, neighbors, the Mayor and Chancellors of the city of Salford, and Magistrates of Eccles Courts for the many expressions of sympathy, letters and cards of condolence, beautiful floral tributes and donations in lieu of flowers, which she has received in her bereavement, also to the nurses and staff at Christie and Bury

Hospitals for their care and attention, and Rev. Alan Wattson for his kind ministration.

B. When you finish your discussion, give the two texts back to the teacher.

C. In small group, write out on OHP an Acknowledgement text to a newspaper thanking people who have attended the funeral of " your dear brother"

D. Discuss what the other groups have written as the teacher show their texts.

E. Homework: Write a text to an English newspaper thanking the people who have offered their sympathy to you on the death of your " dear mother".

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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis of this paper is that the use of Parallel Texts as teaching Materials within a communicative framework could prove insightful for pedagogy i.e. to enable foreign language learners overcome cultural differences.

To this end, first we set the scene for the study in the introduction. Then we define Parallel Texts in the light of the available literature. Besides, we examine the nature of Formulaic Expressions and we shed light on their close relation to culture

Afterwards, we discuss the methodological considerations which can be regarded as a framework to accommodate our Parallel texts. These considerations are essentially based on ideas and concepts related to communicative language teaching.

Finally, sample materials are presented in the light of the ideas discussed in the previous sections.