Questions of Culture and Context
in English Language Textbooks

A Study of Textbooks for the Teaching of English in Norway

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Table of contents

1 Introduction

In its description of the teaching of English, the Norwegian National Curriculum from 1997 (*L-97*) emphasizes the need for students to be aware of the cultural contexts and situations in which communication takes place. The curriculum also indicates that, in foreign language education, an important arena can be established for the development of cultural understanding, respect and tolerance.

The most recent national curriculum (from 2006) follows up *L*-97's focus on the relationship between language, context and culture and on the role that foreign language education can have when it comes to promoting the students' cultural awareness. However, since these are rather recent concerns in the teaching of English in Norwegian compulsory school, further work is probably needed in order to develop the theoretical principles and practical strategies that make it possible to put the new ideas into effect in the actual teaching and learning situation.

The present study aims to contribute to this development. Since textbooks have a central position in Norwegian classrooms, my main focus is on the materials that textbooks can provide and the approaches that they can encourage.

My research data are the textbooks for the teaching of English in Norwegian lower secondary education which were written according to *L*-97. The English syllabus in this curriculum and its formulations related to questions of context and culture have also been investigated. The books have been analyzed and discussed both as a manifestation of the present situation and as a starting point for further development when it comes to incorporating questions of context and culture in the teaching of a foreign language.

Although some of the perspectives in *L-97* on the teaching of English are new in a Norwegian setting, they can be recognized as central concerns in contemporary foreign language learning theory. The present study therefore refers to recent research both in its discussion of the rationale for dealing with questions of context and culture in the realm of foreign language education and also in its investigation of possible classroom procedures.

1.1 Background for the study

English became an obligatory subject for all Norwegian children in the 1960s (Gundem 1989). Since then, knowledge of English has become essential in more and more fields of life, and it has become increasingly important for all parts of the Norwegian population. Consequently, the 1997 National Curriculum established English as a central subject in all ten years of Norwegian compulsory school.

Traditionally, English language skills have been seen, and taught, as tools that can be learned in isolation, separately from the contexts in which they are to be used. The assumption seems to have been that, once mastered, language skills can be used successfully in any communication situation. This approach to foreign language education has been prevalent not only in Norway, but in many other countries as well (Hadley 1993; Simensen 2001).

In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness that linguistic competence alone does not ensure successful communication. Research has shown that, whenever information, emotions or opinions are exchanged, a whole range of contextual and cultural factors seems to have important influence on the interpretation of the meanings that are conveyed (Halliday & Hasan 1985). Therefore, foreign language learning has come to be seen as much more than a question of learning to master the vocabulary, the grammar and the idioms of the foreign language. In order to be able to use the language in real-life situations, it is argued, students also need to understand the link between language, context and culture and to work with and gain insight into some of the aspects of context and culture that come into play in situations of language use (Kramsch 1993).

Knowledge of contexts and cultural frames of reference always constitute a backdrop for language use, both in one's native and in the foreign language. This means that, in order to be able to cope with the contexts of the new language, students also need to reflect on those of their own. *L-97* describes the task for Norwegian learners of English in this way: [Learning to use the language] 'is not a matter of

language skills alone, but of the ability to communicate across cultural divides' (C-*99*: 239).[1]

This indicates yet another dimension of work with questions of context and culture in foreign language education. Since a foreign language is used, most often, in situations where people from different countries and cultural backgrounds meet, students need to be prepared for the cultural challenges that such situations often involve. Successful communication depends on the interlocutors' willingness and ability to try to understand each other, and it is therefore obvious that both cultural and intercultural questions are highly relevant ingredients in any foreign language course (Byram 1989; Corbett 2003). Moreover, since different languages provide different ways of conceptualizing, interpreting and understanding the world, foreign language education has come to be recognized as a golden opportunity to expose students to expressions of 'otherness' and to challenge the students' own perceptions and possible ethnocentric attitudes (Geertz 1973; Fantini 1997).

In correspondence with these views, the English syllabus in *L-97* argues that questions of context and culture need to be worked with in the development of the students' communication skills. The syllabus also underlines how important it is for the students to learn about and to get acquainted with other cultures. This aspect of the English course is described in terms of its information value, but it is also linked to the development of the students' attitudes towards other countries and cultures and of their cultural awareness in general. Knowledge about other countries, it is said, 'lays the foundations for greater respect and tolerance, contributes to new ways of thinking, and broadens [the students'] understanding of their own cultural roots. This gives them a stronger sense of their own identity' (*C-99*: 237).

The English syllabus here links up with one of the overall aims in the National Curriculum, which is to 'counteract prejudice and discrimination, and foster mutual respect and tolerance between groups with differing modes of life' (*C-99*: 26). *L-97* mentions repeatedly how international contacts have become more and more frequent and common for large parts of the Norwegian population. But there are also references

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[1] The quotes from *L-97* have been taken from the English version, *The Curriculum for the 10-year Compulsory School in Norway* (1999), and are therefore identified with reference to *C-99.*

to the increased cultural diversity and the establishment of new cultural meeting places in our own country. Thus, *L-97* points to the fact that, with or without the use of a foreign language, the learners who inhabit Norwegian classrooms have ample opportunities to experience the cultural challenges that meetings between members of different nationalities and cultures involve (see eg Eriksen & Sørheim 2003; Tjelmeland & Brochmann 2003).

The objectives related to the cultural dimension of the teaching of English according to *L-97* may be clear enough, but the syllabus gives only vague guidelines as to how questions of context and culture should be dealt with and how the development of cultural awareness should be brought about. Authors of textbooks written according to *L-97* and teachers, attempting to meet the new requirements, have therefore had to plow new ground in starting to define a previously unfamiliar terrain within the teaching of English.

The following, then, is the starting point for my study. Recent research and curricular requirements indicate the need for an increased focus on questions of context and culture in foreign language education. The motivation for this is linked both to the development of the students' communication skills and to their ability to position themselves in a world of great cultural diversity. However, important questions emerge: How can questions of context and culture be incorporated in a foreign language course? How can the teaching of a foreign language provide an arena for the development of cultural awareness and understanding?

1.2 The objective and the content of the thesis

The objective of the present study is to provide some answers to the questions above, with specific reference to the teaching of English in Norwegian compulsory education. As already indicated, the bulk of my material is the four textbook series which were written according to *L-97* for the teaching of English at the Norwegian 'ungdomsskole' level (grades eight through ten). The English syllabus in *L-97* also constitutes a part of my research materials.

The study aims to describe and discuss the ways in which questions of context and culture are dealt with in present-day textbooks, with a main focus on the thinking

and the rationale that seem to underlie the choices that have been made. But a main concern in the study is also to indicate ways in which this aspect of foreign language education can be developed further in the future.

By describing and discussing present-day principles and practices in light of the theoretical perspectives that can be found in recent research in the field, I hope to contribute to a heightened awareness of - as well as a more informed basis for - the choices that can be made when designing future textbooks for the teaching of English. At the same time, by linking possible future developments to existing teaching materials, I hope to make these developments more viable both for students, teachers and textbook producers. It is my belief that, in order to change educational practices, there is always reason to use the existing educational culture as a point of departure (Holliday 1994; Corbett 2003).

There are several reasons why I have chosen to focus on the material in the textbooks. First of all, textbooks have always played a very central role in determining the content and the methods worked with in all subjects in Norwegian compulsory schools. Vestre (1980) and Johnsen (1989) claim that this is the case to an even greater degree for English than for other subjects. Also, due to the Norwegian system of official certification of textbooks, there is only a limited number of textbooks in use, and the books that form the basis for the teaching of English are therefore easily accessible (Johnsen 1993).[2]

I am well aware that there is, of course, an infinite number of elements that work together in determining the nature and the outcome of a foreign language learning situation. No textbook will, alone, be able to assure that the students develop insight into questions of context and culture and awareness of intercultural issues. However, the strong position of the English language textbook in Norwegian schools indicates that the materials and procedures for classroom work presented in the textbooks will be crucial factors in the development of new perspectives and new practices in the teaching of English.

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[2] Norway is one of the few countries in the world that has had a system of official certification of textbooks. The system has been in effect since 1860, but was abolished by the Norwegian Parliament in June, 2000 (Selander & Skjelbred 2004). Today, then, schools and teachers are free to use any teaching materials they wish. However, considering the long tradition of selecting among a limited number of authorized textbook series, there is reason to believe that schools and teachers in the future also will opt for teaching materials that are produced by one of Norway's main publishers.

Although the main focus of the present study is on the teaching of English, many of the issues discussed are, clearly, relevant to the teaching of any foreign language. Therefore, in order to indicate this broader scope, I often use the terms 'foreign language education' and 'the teaching of a foreign language' rather than 'English education' and 'the teaching of English'. It should also be noted that, although the teaching of English in Norway can be seen as a result of the specific position that this language and this subject have had in Norwegian society, it is also part of a larger picture. Thus, when I discuss past traditions and present developments, obvious references are being made to general tendencies in other parts of the Western world. In this way, despite the limited scope of the study, it is my hope that some of the issues and findings presented here will be of some relevance to textbook research and textbook development related to other foreign languages and other countries as well.

The research questions have been formulated as follows:

1. How are questions of context and culture dealt with in the English syllabus in *L-97*?
2. How are questions of context and culture dealt with in present-day textbooks for the teaching of English in Norwegian lower secondary education?
3. Which objectives seem to be attached to questions of context and culture in these texts?
4. Which challenges and opportunities do *L-97* and the textbooks point to when it comes to incorporating questions of context and culture in curricular documents and textbooks for the teaching and learning of English in the future?

The first two research questions will be answered by way of an investigation of the references that the English syllabus in *L-97* makes to questions of context and culture and of the materials and approaches related to this aspect of foreign language education that have been included in the textbooks. This investigation also provides, of course, the necessary basis in order to answer research question three. This question addresses the need to be aware of the rationale behind an educational strategy and to

make the principles on which it is based explicit (Widdowson 1990), and I therefore also look at the ways in which the rationale for including – or not including – questions of context and culture are communicated in the *L-97* English syllabus and in the textbooks. Research question four, which opens for a discussion of the potential for further development of curricular documents and textbooks, will be explored with reference to the results that the investigation of these texts provide.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background for the thesis. First, I look into the concepts of 'context' and 'culture' and investigate the understanding that language, context and culture are interrelated. Secondly, I discuss some of the implications that such a view has for the teaching of a foreign language in general and for the teaching of English as an international language in particular.

Chapter 2 also provides a theoretical background to the present study's investigation of the *L-97* English syllabus and the English language textbooks by discussing the different roles that curricular documents and textbook materials can play in the foreign language classroom. In the last part of the chapter, I provide a brief historical overview of the ways in which language, context and culture have been worked with in foreign language education in the past. The traditions described here function, in turn, as points of reference in the subsequent analysis and discussion of my research materials.

Chapter 3 follows up the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 2 and applies them to the foreign language teaching and learning situation. Thus, the chapter investigates how notions such as 'context', 'culture' and 'intercultural learning' can be understood and how they can be dealt with in the classroom situation. My main focus is, naturally, on the ways in which textbook materials can encourage different types of work with questions of context and culture, and I discuss different principles that can guide the selection of texts, topics and activities. Since the learner him- or herself will – and must - always be at the center of the learning situation, some issues related to the difficult balance between school authority and learner autonomy are also discussed here.

Chapter 4 presents the materials and the methods used in the study. Here, I describe my research design and my research materials as well as the approaches that I have used in order to answer the four research questions.

The 1997 National Curriculum is dealt with in Chapter 5, and the main focus is on the explicit requirements and guidelines that the English syllabus provides for work with questions of context and culture and on the objectives that seem to be linked to such work. But the chapter also discusses more implicit statements in the document of the role that questions of context and culture can play in the teaching of English.

Chapters 6 through 10 describe and discuss the four textbook series that were written according to *L-97* and the materials and the approaches that they offer. Different perspectives are used in order to cast light on the choices that have been made in these textbooks and on the challenges and opportunities that seem to present themselves for producers of textbooks in the future.

Chapter 6 addresses the view that, in order for students to be able to work with and learn about questions of context and culture, specific aspects of situational and cultural contexts need to be brought to the students' attention. The chapter discusses how the textbook texts and also the introductions, commentaries and activities that are attached to them can contribute to making different aspects of the contexts and the meaning potential that they represent visible for the students.

Chapter 7 presents and discusses the cultural material in the textbooks, ie the material that provides students with information about and / or encounters with foreign countries and cultures. The chapter aims to cast light on the different objectives that can be linked to students' work with cultural material by way of an investigation of the texts and topics that have been selected, the ways in which they are presented and the ways in which students are expected to work with them.

Most of the cultural material is presented in the form of prose texts for reading and listening, but poetry, songs and illustrations have also been included. The discussion of the prose texts and the exercises and activities that are attached to them constitutes the bulk of the chapter. For the sake of clarity, non-fictional and fictional texts are discussed separately, and the discussion is ordered by way of the country that the texts deal with.

While Chapter 7 has a primary focus on the non-linguistic content of the texts, Chapter 8 looks into the presentation of English and English language use. Here, the most central issue is the development of the students' ability to use the language appropriately in different situations, and the chapter discusses the ways in which students are – and can be - prepared for the great diversity of the English language and of the contexts in which it can be used.

Chapter 9 follows up the perspective on foreign language use as an arena of intercultural contact and the need for foreign language students to develop insight into some of the challenges that intercultural encounters may involve. On the basis of a description of the ways in which intercultural issues are dealt with in today's textbooks, the chapter discusses some principles that can be used as points of reference in work with such questions in textbooks in the future.

Chapter 10 brings many of the perspectives in the previous chapters together by looking at the opportunities that students are given to define their own positions and to 'speak with their own voice' when working with English. In order for students to develop as independent and creative users of the foreign language, it seems necessary to allow them – and to encourage them – to relate the opportunities and the challenges involved to their own lives and their own contexts, and Chapter 10 discusses ways in which this can be done.

Chapter 11, the conclusion, sums up the results and the implications of the study by focusing on the objectives that can be linked to work with questions of context and culture in a foreign language course. It also points to some of the considerations that seem to be most central when planning work that aims to reach these different objectives. Finally, the conclusion places the study in a larger perspective and indicates some research areas that can cast additional light on the ways in which questions of context and culture are - and can be - dealt with in foreign language education.

2 Theoretical background

This chapter presents the theoretical background for the study by way of two main focal points. First, I look into the *raison d'être* for the present study as well as for the field of inquiry of which it is a part: *Why* is it important to consider questions of context and culture when teaching a foreign language? Secondly, I provide some background to the discussion of *how* this can be done.

Section 2.1 presents the concepts and theoretical perspectives that form the basis of the study. The view that language, context and culture are interrelated is central here, and the section concludes by discussing some of the implications that such a view can have for the teaching of a foreign language.

It has been argued that, when English is taught as a language for international communication, the links between the language and the cultures that it has traditionally been associated with need to be reconsidered. Section 2.2 looks into this discussion and points to the infinite number of situational and cultural contexts in which English can be used as a lingua franca. However, since language always will be embedded in one context or another, I argue that mastery of a foreign language must necessarily involve some knowledge about and awareness of questions of context and culture.

As a background to the present study's investigation and discussion of the 1997 Norwegian National Curriculum and the textbooks that were produced in its wake, section 2.3 looks into the different principles, requirements and guidelines that curricular documents can provide. With reference to the central position that textbooks seem to have in Norwegian schools, I also discuss the different functions that a textbook can have in the foreign language classroom.

Traditionally, different links have been indicated between the foreign language and the contexts and cultures in which it can be used. Section 2.4 investigates these links and focuses primarily on the objectives that have seemed to underlie the choice of materials and approaches. Insight into this tradition will, the way I see it, constitute a useful background when trying to identify the choices that can be made when it

comes to dealing with questions of context and culture in the teaching of a foreign language today – and tomorrow.

2.1 The interrelationship between language, context and culture

It was indicated in the introduction that the notions of 'context' and 'culture' are central in foreign language education. This section provides further insight into these two concepts and explores the view that language, context and culture are entities that are closely linked together (sections 2.1.1 - 2.1.2). The understanding that language, context and culture are, somehow, interrelated can have different implications for foreign language education, and section 2.1.3 looks into some of these.

2.1.1 What is context?

The term 'context' is used in many different ways. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* gives a definition in two parts:

- the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea
- the parts that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning (Soanes & Stevenson 2004).

The second part of this definition refers to a linguistic context, ie the parts of language that either precede or follow a word or a passage. The first part of the definition relates to the wider context, the 'setting'. It is worth noticing that, while the definition points to the impact that the linguistic context has on the meaning of a word or a sentence, no mention is made of the influence that the wider context may have on the way in which an event, statement or idea is interpreted.

This can be said to reflect an understanding of language that has been common for centuries. Meaning has been attached to the words and sentences of the language or, rather, to the parts of the 'real' world that language is seen to refer to (Svennevig, Sandvik & Vagle 1995). This view has certainly been dominant in foreign language education, which has a long tradition of dealing with the linguistic aspects of a foreign language, separately from the contexts in which it can be used – and understood (Stern 1983).

In the 20th century, however, other ways of looking at meaning in language emerged. Several scholars pointed to the variable and relative reference that linguistic signs may have and, consequently, to the important role that context plays in determining the meaning of language (Svennevig, Sandvik & Vagle 1995). Important influences came from the field of anthropology, where Malinowski (1923) introduced the terms 'context of situation' and 'context of culture'. In trying to explain the meaning of Kiriwinian texts (from the Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific) to his English-speaking readers, he felt the need to provide information not only about the situation in which the texts unfolded, but also about the wider context, the total cultural background. While Malinowski applied the concepts only to the particular situation of the Kiriwinian texts, Firth (1968) developed them further to apply to the study of language in general.[3]

But context is not only something that needs to be taken into consideration in order to understand a given instance of language. According to Halliday & Hasan (1985), language only makes sense when it is placed within some context or situation, and language (text) and context are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Halliday & Hasan use the term 'cycle of text and context' to indicate that the notions of text and context are inseparable, ie that texts and contexts are each other's contexts. The cycle encompasses the text itself and its relations to other texts, as well as contextual factors related to situation and culture.

This means that, when trying to understand something that is said or written, we also, simultaneously, interpret the context in which the text is embedded. Given an instance of language, we are immediately able to construct and interpret the situation in which the text functions (Fish 1980). Widdowson (1995) illustrates this phenomenon by referring to our ability to even interpret the single letter 'P' as a meaningful text, provided that we meet it in a context where parking a car is relevant.

Given a situation, we are usually able to anticipate the kinds of meaning that will be exchanged and, based on our previous knowledge of the situation we will, to a certain extent, be able to predict what our interlocutor is going to say (Halliday & Hasan 1985). Interlocutors who share the same background knowledge will, naturally,

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[3] Firth's article was originally written in 1935.

have better chances of understanding one another than interlocutors who do not (Scollon & Scollon 2001).

When we use our native language, within our own discourse community, we are hardly aware of the way in which our prior knowledge of context helps us act in a language situation and make sense of what is being said or written. When we use a foreign language, on the other hand, we often lack this background knowledge. It has been argued that the problems that users of a foreign language experience are caused just as much by their lack of knowledge about social values, norms of behavior and cultural frames of reference as by their limited linguistic repertoire (Thompson 1993).

It seems obvious, then, that learners of a foreign language need to concern themselves not only with the linguistic aspects of the language, but also with the contexts in which it can be used. Only then can they develop the ability to interpret the references that are being made in a communication situation and to explore the full meaning potential of the language. Insight into and awareness of the interrelationship between language and its contexts is, of course, also a necessary prerequisite for students to be able to use the language appropriately in different situations (Kramsch 1993). It is this insight that seems to be reflected in *L-97* and which, in part, constitutes the starting point for the present study.

In order to discuss questions of context and the ways in which they can be dealt with in the foreign language classroom, it seems useful to maintain a distinction between the notions of 'context of situation' and 'context of culture' and perhaps to break these notions down into even smaller components that can be singled out and worked with.[4] At the same time, Halliday & Hasan's concept of a 'cycle of text and context' can be used as a reminder of the close relationship that exists between the different elements in the cycle. Thus, it could be argued that the main task for foreign language learning is not to identify and to cover an extensive inventory of elements in this cycle, but rather to prepare students to cope with the complexity of it.

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[4] Although they are part of the same cycle and work together, simultaneously, Halliday & Hasan (1985) also use these two terms. In their terminology, 'the context of situation' has to do with the time, place, participants and the objectives of the text, while the cultural context is said to consist of 'the institutional and ideological background that give value to the text and constrain its interpretation' (1985: 49).

2.1.2 What is culture?

It may seem that foreign language education has a long tradition of dealing with the 'context of culture'. According to Kelly (1969), a cultural component has been included in foreign language courses throughout several centuries. But what has this cultural component consisted of, and why has it been included? What does – or what *can* - the notion of culture mean in the realm of foreign education? Before I look further into these questions, I will look at the concept of culture in more general terms.

2.1.2.1   Defining the concept of culture

Defining culture is no simple task. According to Duranti (1997), culture is such a complex notion that it may be neither possible nor desirable to arrive at an all-encompassing definition of it. Instead, theories of culture today tend to relate to specific contexts and fields of study (1997: 49). Nevertheless, as a starting point for the following discussion, it may be useful to cite a definition which, according to those who have formulated it, 'covers most of the major territory of culture on which scholars currently agree' (Samovar, Porter & Stefani 1998: 36):

> We define culture as the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (ibid: 36).

This definition shows that culture is seen as something which is acquired or learned, and passed down from one generation to the next. Culture is seen as having to do with the material productions through which a group of people represents itself ('artifacts'), but the definition focuses first and foremost on people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering. In linking culture to 'a group of people', the definition indicates that culture is shared by the members of a particular community, and that one community is, somehow, different from another in terms of culture.

Culture is learned, both consciously and unconsciously, but once learned, it is automatic and subconscious (Samovar, Porter & Stefani 1998). Hofstede (1991) refers to culture as 'the software of the mind', ie the shared rules that tell us how to behave and act within a particular group. Culture becomes a 'perceptual lens' through which

we see and make sense of the outside world. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) point to the way in which people from different cultures understand events, speech acts and physical phenomena differently, according to the 'model of their mind'.

What, then, is it that designates a 'group of people', and what is it that distinguishes one cultural group from another? In short: how do cultures differ? These, of course, are fundamental questions that can produce innumerable answers. What remains clear, however, is that knowledge of an international language like English can, potentially, bring one into contact with a variety of different cultural groups, and that non-native speakers who wish to learn and to use English necessarily need to address questions like the ones above.

Culture is arbitrary, in the way that 'I could have been you and you could have been me, given different circumstances' (Kramsch 1997: 4). However, most of us do not perceive culture in this way. Since culture is all-pervasive and subconscious, we tend to see our own cultural ways as the only 'natural' ones, or in fact as the only ones possible. Since culture is always linked up with moral issues, we tend to see our own culture as having the correct answers to what is good and bad, morally acceptable and unacceptable, beautiful and ugly (Kramsch 1997).

This situation represents quite a challenge for anyone who wants to communicate successfully with someone from another cultural group. In today's world, where cultural encounters and the challenges that they bring with them are the order of the day, it therefore seems increasingly important to be able to see beyond one's own culture and to appreciate the fact that different cultures have different ways of looking at the world. As will be shown in the following sections, foreign language learning can be seen to have an important role to play when it comes to developing this ability.

2.1.2.2   Language and culture

In section 2.1.1, I argued that 'the context of culture' is one part of the cycle of text and context which must be interpreted in order for us to understand the meaning of a given instance of language. This indicates that there is a close connection between language and culture. In fact, it is claimed that language is the 'carrier' of culture,

since it is through language that we learn about, share and participate in the development of culture (Duranti 1997).

According to Berger & Luckmann (1985), ordinary conversation is the main medium through which we are all socialized into a community. It is by learning a language that we are brought up to share the common values, beliefs and concerns of a community (Fowler 1996). It has been claimed that 'the first, most basic, and all-pervasive element of […] culture is control of the native language' (Hadley 1993: 361).

The notion that language and culture are closely linked together stems from the awareness that nature has no 'natural structure' from which language draws its meanings passively (Fowler 1996). Rather, it is language that provides us with a classification of phenomena and experience and a system of categorization that make the world around us manageable. Our thoughts are not prior to language and language is not just a useful device we use in order to express them, but language is the very thing that makes thought possible (cf eg Vagle, Sandvik & Svennevig 1993). The anthropologist Edmund Leach (1964: 34) says:

> This world is a representation of our language categories, not vice versa. Because my mother tongue is English, it seems self evident that *bushes* and *trees* are different kinds of things. I would not think this unless I had been taught that it was the case.

The many words that some Sami and Inuit languages have to explain 'snow' have been used as the prime example when talking about the relationship between language, culture and thought. This example shows, on the one hand, how the development of lexical items of a language may be culturally motivated. On the other hand, the example can be used to indicate how the experience of snow may be quite limited for those of us who do not speak these languages, because of our lack of words to conceptualize different snow conditions (Duranti 1997).

The so-called 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' is central in the discussion of the relationship between language and culture. Sapir wrote in 1929:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of

expression for their society… The real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (in Mandelbaum 1949: 162).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been interpreted in different ways, and one often refers to a 'strong' and a 'weak' version of it (Nelson 1995; Bredella & Richter 2000). The strong version has been linked to a discussion of 'linguistic determinism', and the argument goes that human beings somehow are prisoners of the categories and meanings that their language provides them with.

On the other hand, it has been asserted that a language embodies *many* possible ways of representing the world, and that an extreme interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is problematic (Halliday 1971; Fowler 1996). The weak version of the hypothesis is used to support the view that language certainly structures, but that it does not determine, thought (Nelson 1995).

It has also been pointed out that Sapir refers only to the *framework* formed by a social and linguistic community, and that the notion of linguistic determinism must be linked to cognition related to the language *code* and not to language *use* in communication (Widdowson 1998b: 139). In this view, individuals are seen to be constrained by established conventions and regulations, but they are not absolutely controlled by them. As Widdowson puts it, 'there is always room for maneuvre. That is our salvation' (1996: 58). Halliday (1971) also underlines the meaning potential of language:

Language is itself a potential: it is the totality of what the speaker can do. […] At every point the speaker is selecting among a range of possibilities that differ in meaning (1971: 337-338).

This, then, accounts for the fact that English, for example, can be used in quite different ways by native speakers who live under very different conditions, in quite different communities, in all corners of the world (Crystal 1995). It is obvious that, although these users of English share many concepts and categories that are embedded in language, they do not share the same knowledge, experience, values and beliefs, and it would be absurd to claim that all speakers of English represent the same culture.

Rather, it must be concluded that there are multiple relationships between language and culture and that English, in particular, is related to a whole range of different cultures around the world (Nelson 1995; Alptekin 2002; McKay 2002).

It can be argued, however, that although a language offers great potential for a diversity of meanings, users of a language are often not aware of this potential. There is always a tendency that the meanings of a language, the codes and categories that are embedded in it and the norms for its use become authorized by those who have the power to do so and are passed on, in society and to future generations, as legitimated language. Fowler (1996) warns that this fossilization of language can contribute to making our experience habitual and our perception automatic and uncritical.[5] One should also be aware, he says, of the ways in which language evolves, over long periods of history, to suit the needs of society and that this may involve the preservation of – perhaps unwanted – power structures in a community (ibid: 43-44).

Within any language community, there seems to be continuous tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin 1981). Centripetal forces, on the one hand, work towards a unified language use, as described in Fowler's argument above, while centrifugal forces, on the other hand, push speakers away from a common center, towards more diversified language use. The agents behind the centrifugal forces are the users of the language who find themselves in the periphery of the social system (Duranti 1997).

This perspective seems to be highly relevant to foreign language education. In the teaching and learning of English, in particular, many different varieties of language (and culture) can be focused on, and students can be given insight into the various ways in which different cultures use the language to construct their social reality.

But English can also be presented as a non-diversified phenomenon. If the latter approach is chosen, it can be argued that English language education contributes to the centripetal forces in the world community of English speakers and to what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as 'verbal-ideological centralization'.

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[5] The novelist George Orwell has also, very effectively, described the possible dangers of letting language do the thinking for us, for example in his famous essay 'Politics and the English Language' (Fowler 1996).

2.1.2.3 The notion of culture in foreign language education

Traditionally, the notion of culture has been understood in different ways in foreign language education, and cultural questions have been included for different reasons. Section 2.4 provides a survey of past traditions when it comes to dealing with questions of context and culture in the foreign language classroom. Here, I will only describe the parts of those traditions that help cast light on the ways in which the notion of culture seems to have been defined. The way I see it, this can be done most effectively by looking at the objectives that have been linked to work with cultural questions.

Broadly speaking, one can say that three main objectives have been linked to work with cultural questions in the foreign language classroom (Risager 1989). One has to do with the students' cognitive development, and focus has been on providing students with information about the country or countries where the language is spoken. Another objective has to do with the development of the students' foreign language skills. Here, the main concern has been to provide students with insight into the foreign culture so that they will be able to communicate in an appropriate way in the new cultural contexts. A third objective for work with cultural issues in foreign language education has been to develop the students' attitudes towards other countries and cultures (Risager 1989).

Information about a foreign country could, of course, be seen to constitute a part of the 'cultural context' of language that was mentioned in the previous sections, and thus contribute to the students' understanding of language in context. However, traditionally, the information provided has been quite limited and has aimed, first and foremost, to expose students to elitist manifestations of culture and to contribute to their general education (Risager 1987; Nelson 1995). Focus has been on aspects of the country's 'high culture', ie its intellectual and artistic achievements, its institutions and history. 'High culture' is also often referred to as 'culture with a capital C' (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993; Sercu 2002). Prior to the 1960s, it was 'big C' culture that had precedence in most foreign language classrooms (Hadley 1993).

Cultural topics have also, of course, been introduced as 'carrier content', ie the content which is needed for language to be used at all (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998).

However, with the increased focus on the students' practical language skills in the 1960s and 1970s, topics were often selected in order to exemplify vocabulary and structures that would be particularly useful for the students. In this tradition, the 'carrier content' may not have provided much insight into the foreign culture, as the topics were chosen, first and foremost, in order to link up with the students' own experience and interests (Risager 1987).

The cultural topics that have been selected in order to aid in the development of the students' language skills have most often been based on an anthropological notion of culture. This can be defined as 'the taken-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people that set that group apart as a distinctive group' (Scollon & Scollon 2001: 139). 'Small c culture' is also a term that has been used (Sercu 2002). The idea is to provide students with insight into the do's and the don'ts of the 'target' foreign culture, so that they can know what to expect in a communication situation and be able to adapt their verbal and non-verbal behavior accordingly (Risager 1987).

The teaching of culture in foreign language classrooms with the intention of developing the students' attitudes towards other cultures as well as their feelings of empathy, respect and tolerance towards 'the other' does not have a long tradition. As indicated in section 1.1, the English syllabus in *L-97* brings in this perspective as a new element in the teaching of English in Norway. Because this area of interest is a relatively recent phenomenon and because it seems to draw on and relate to a number of different fields of study, it is difficult to sum up a 'state-of-the-art' (Jæger 1995).

As the present study indicates, both the theoretical foundation and the practical methods for work with intercultural issues in foreign language education seem to be under development. What is clear, however, is that previous ways of looking at culture and working with cultural questions are not considered conducive to the development of the students' intercultural awareness. Thus, the ideas of teaching students about a particular country's 'high culture' and of preparing students for appropriate language use only in a target community seem to be rejected. Instead, many scholars claim that the focus of attention needs to be on the difference between cultures, and on the negotiation of meaning that takes place in situations when members of different cultures meet (Zarate 1982).

Traditionally, culture has been understood – and taught - as having to do with a particular country and its population. There are several reasons why this view is being contested (Tornberg 2000). First of all, there has been an increased understanding of the many-faceted nature of the nation state. Within its borders, a nation holds not only people of many different nationalities and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. There are also innumerable subcultures, which may identify themselves to varying degrees with the dominant culture (McLaren 1995; Bauman 1999). Related to English language use, the diversity of cultures, both within nation states and internationally, is particularly striking.

Secondly, there seems to be a movement away from the view that culture is something static, with clear boundaries between 'us' and 'them', between 'insider' and 'outsider' (eg Said 1978; Bauman 1999). Rather, culture is seen as something that changes continually and is constantly re-negotiated in meetings between people. Thus, it can be asserted that, in situations of communication between people from different cultures, a 'third culture' is being built (Casmir 1999).

Casmir relates chaos theory to communication studies and describes third culture-building as a 'mutually beneficial, dialogic communication process which allows for ambiguity and the creation of meaning under chaotic circumstances' (ibid: 94). A similar line of thought can be seen in Tornberg (2000), who talks about culture as 'an encounter in an open landscape' in a space which she claims is shared by everyone, but owned by no-one (ibid: 79).

Both Casmir and Tornberg seem to indicate that the parties in a cultural encounter have the same rights and possibilities when it comes to the exchange and negotiation of meaning. Bhabha (1994), on the other hand, has a different perspective. He, also, rejects the notion of culture as a stable system of reference in terms of which 'others' can be valued. He talks about the enunciation of a hybrid culture in a 'Third Space'. It is, according to Bhabha

> the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space, that
> carries the burden of the meaning of culture (1994: 38). [...] It is that
> Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the
> discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and
> symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same

signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew (ibid: 37).

Bhabha's main concern is the need for people in earlier colonies to protest the authority of the colonizers' culture and to construct their own cultural identification. However, it seems that a parallel can be drawn here, between the authority of the colonizer's culture and the authority of the target culture in a foreign language learning situation. It can be argued that both the colonized and the language learner need to become aware of the asymmetrical power relations involved in cultural encounters, and of the potential to secure one's own cultural identity that lies in the concept of the third space (Kramsch 1997).

The traditional way of looking at culture in foreign language education as the study of monolithic and undiversified societies may seem something of an anachronism. In other fields of study, this notion of culture has been left long ago, in favor of post-modernist views of societies and individuals. The individual's cultural identity can be a key word here, as few people today, at least in the Western world, regard themselves merely as members of one, homogenous and unified cultural group. There seems, then, to be a need to acknowledge and deal with multiple and complex cultural identities both when presenting foreign cultures to foreign language learners and when preparing the ways in which the learners themselves are expected to position themselves vis-à-vis the foreign language (Atkinson 1999; Sercu 2002).

With this in mind, it can be argued that the negotiation of cultural meaning might, in many instances, be as challenging in encounters between people from different backgrounds *within* one nation state as it is in encounters between people of different nationalities (Scollon & Scollon 2001). However, as Byram (1997) points out, from the perspective of foreign language education, the difference between intra-cultural and inter-cultural communication is significant. The foreign language learner clearly needs a new kind of linguistic-cultural competence in dealing with the new language, and it is the concern of foreign language education to provide a basis for the development of this competence.

It has been argued that some of the difficulties in designing quality instruction in cultural aspects of foreign language education can be related to the fact that 'the

area of what constitutes culture is poorly defined' (Stern 1981: 16). While Stern makes a valid point, it could also be argued that the main problem has been the different, and often unclear, objectives that have been attached to the cultural material. In the future, the main challenge seems to lie in defining the purpose of the cultural material more clearly. If the objectives for work with questions of culture are stated explicitly and unambiguously, this will certainly be a good staring point in order to define what 'culture' means and which links one should make between language and culture in a foreign language course (Brøgger 1992).

2.1.3 The interrelationship between language, context and culture - implications for foreign language education

There can be different pedagogical implications of the view that language, context and culture are interrelated. First of all, there are implications related to the teaching of language itself. For anyone who wishes to be able to interpret and understand meanings presented to him or her, the different cultural meanings embedded in language, the contexts and the cultural references of a language must necessarily be explored and, to the degree that it is possible, learned. In the same way, insight into the different aspects of situational and cultural contexts that come into play whenever language is used is an important factor in the foreign language learner's ability to produce his or her own texts and to take part in communication situations.

Secondly, since language not only reports experience, but represents a way of defining it, foreign language learning can provide a unique opportunity to experience and gain insight into new ways of conceptualizing and looking at the world (Geertz 1973). The implication is not, of course, that different languages provide completely different conceptual frameworks. It has been argued that there is a common core in all languages of linguistic and conceptual universals that can be used as a common ground from which differences between languages and cultures can be explored (Wierzbicka 1997). Thus, learners will not experience the challenge of having to develop completely new views of the world, but rather be able to *expand* their vision of the world (Fantini 1997: 11). In exposing students to languages and conceptual frameworks different from their own, foreign language education can therefore be seen as a golden opportunity to expose students to expressions of 'otherness' and to

challenge the students' own perceptions and possible ethnocentric attitudes (Kramsch 1993).

The way we seem to accept an arbitrary code of fixed – and often prejudicial – categories uncritically is also an issue that can be addressed as part of foreign language education (Bredella & Richter 2000). 'Critical language awareness' could thus be a central component of language learning in schools, in order to unveil and make students aware of the role that language plays in preserving power structures in society and on the ways in which language functions ideologically (Fairclough 1989, 1995). One strategy suggested for such work is to produce alternative texts (Widdowson 1996; Toolan 1997), and this may seem to be a particularly relevant one in foreign language education.

2.2 The teaching of English as an international language

Much of the debate over whether or not, and possibly how, cultural questions should be incorporated into the teaching of English has been linked to a discussion of the role of English as a lingua franca. If English is used in situations of international communication, it is asked, how can it keep its traditional ties to specific countries and cultures? Moreover, since English appears as a quite diversified phenomenon around the world, how do we know which variety of English to teach? This section looks into some of the questions that the focus on English as a means of international communication gives rise to.

Section 2.2.1 deals with attempts that have been made to define a standard of English that can be taught as a lingua franca. Section 2.2.2 addresses – and argues against - the claim that, when taught as an international language, English needs to be seen as a separate entity, isolated from any particular cultural context. Native speaker competence is an issue that is particularly relevant in the discussion of English as a lingua franca, and section 2.2.3 discusses whether it is possible – and desirable – to maintain such an ideal for students of English today.

2.2.1 Standards of English as an international language

One major concern in the discussion of English as an international language has been to try to solve the dilemma that seems to rise from the increased focus on 'New

Englishes' on the one hand and attempts to secure the functionality of English as a language for international communication on the other. It has been argued that, when new varieties of English are encouraged and used by increasing numbers of speakers, there is a danger that English will fragment into many, mutually unintelligible languages (Erling 2000).

Consequently, much work has gone into describing the sort of 'common denominator' of English that can be accepted and used by people all over the world, as a lingua franca. It has been suggested that the way to go is to simplify English and to arrive at an internationally comprehensible minimum of the language. Quirk (1982), for example, proposes a variety which is stripped of many features, but which has its communicative 'nucleus' intact. Thus the name: 'Nuclear English'. Other scholars have aimed to modernize English by incorporating traits of the many regional varieties of English into a new standard form. Examples here are 'English as an International Auxiliary Language' (Smith 1983), 'General English' (Ahulu 1997) and 'World Standard Spoken English' (Crystal 1997).

One idea behind these suggestions for new standards of English is that, if the new standard differs considerably from the type of English that many native speakers of the language use for everyday communication, it would have to be learned by native and non-native speakers alike. One positive effect of this would be that everyone in the world could have equal access to it, and that native speakers no longer could claim 'ownership' of the language. It could also be seen as a positive effect that such a lingua franca could be freed of any associations with specific social, cultural or political contexts (Erling 2000).

However, no consensus as to what the new type of English should look like has yet been reached, and there seem to be many hindrances on the way to such an agreement. The idea of deciding on a common core of English leaves one with the problem of deciding what this core should consist of, and who the custodians of such a language should be (Widdowson 1994). Also, questions have been raised as to how a new standard should be confined, since all languages, naturally, change as they are being used. Another problem is related to the notion of a culture-free language, as it is a well-known fact that neither Esperanto nor Volapük have been a great success. It has

also been pointed out that the new standards of English that have been suggested do not really seem to be new standards at all. According to Erling (2000), they are only new labels for the type of English that has been the prime lingua franca for decades, namely the variety that is commonly known as 'Standard English'.

And maybe this situation is indicative of a possible, and perhaps obvious, answer to the questions related to English as an international language. English is used in today's world as the most important means of international communication and it can be argued that this, in itself, is the main force in the future development of the language. The very fact that it is used for international communication will act as a guarantee that it remains intelligible for those who need it. At the same time, English as an international language will, as all other languages, change in order to meet changing needs (Widdowson 2000).

2.2.2 Culture-free language teaching?

Although the need to include questions of context and culture when teaching a foreign language may seem obvious, several voices have been raised to argue against the teaching of culture as part of foreign language education. Different reasons have been given. One argument has to do with the difficulty of the task. Another argument stresses the danger of oversimplification and of reducing other cultures to monolithic and static categories that are easy to teach. Yet another argument is related particularly to the teaching of English and has to do with issues of cultural domination and cultural imperialism.

No-one will dispute the fact that trying to come to terms with cultural differences and, especially, trying to prepare students for communication across an infinite number of such differences, is a demanding task. Situations of misunderstandings and unease are common even for someone with a considerable level of cultural insight, and cultural awareness and willingness to show cultural sensitivity may, in fact, create new levels of problems (Scollon & Scollon 2001). It therefore comes as no surprise that some people may experience 'cross-cultural paralysis' and want to avoid such minefields of potential problems altogether (Guest 2002: 155). On the other hand, it can certainly be argued that inability to meet cultural challenges and feelings of frustration in communication situations should rather be

seen as a reason to learn more about intercultural issues than less (Scollon & Scollon 2001).

The argument related to the danger of oversimplification is one which needs to be kept in mind whenever pictures of 'the other' are presented. According to Guest (2002), it is the influence from cultural anthropology that has brought into foreign language education the tendency to describe other cultures in terms of their essential characteristics. Contrastive analysis between different cultures often results in a 'taxonomy of differences', but such analysis more often than not conveys stereotypes and oversimplified pictures. Guest argues that such an approach is used by nationalists, racists and other extremists that foreign language educationalists hardly would want to be associated with, in order to create a clear opposition between 'us' and 'them'. In providing monolithic, essentialized pictures of other cultures, foreign language education runs the risk of perpetuating prejudiced views rather than counteracting them.

This, however, seems to be no argument for disregarding cultural and intercultural questions in a foreign language course. On the contrary, in order to prepare students for successful communication, it seems quite important to draw their attention to the tendency that many people have of making simplified pictures of 'the other'. It is a curious fact that, while we tend to interpret a foreigner's behaviour as being representative of that culture, we most often interpret the behaviour of people from our own culture in terms of their personality and not their cultural background (Guest 2002). Thus, since communication takes place between people, and not between cultures, it seems important for learners of a foreign language to be aware that whatever may be true for the culture as a whole may not at all be true for the individual members of it. Rather than focusing on some alleged characteristics of other cultures, then, it could be argued that students need to be prepared to meet individuals and to interpret their behaviour and their language in terms of individual, and not collective, characteristics (Scollon & Scollon 2001; Guest 2002; McKay 2002).

In the teaching of English as a foreign language, the challenges related to cultural domination and cultural imperialism have received considerable attention. English is traditionally associated primarily with the United States (a contemporary

super power) and the United Kingdom (a former colonial power), and it comes as no surprise that, in many parts of the world, the cultural content and the cultural values that seem to come with English language instruction are not well received (McKay 2002). It has also been asserted that there is a breach of logic when English taught for purposes of international communication refers to and is placed within the cultural contexts of specific nations (Nelson 1995; Alptekin 2002).

Some scholars have tried to solve this dilemma by investigating ways in which English can be taught separately from a particular cultural context. Part of this work has been linked to the development of possible new standards for English as an international language, some of which aim to be 'culture-free as calculus' (Quirk 1982: 44). But it has also been argued that it can hardly be the language itself that is the culprit when it comes to imposing Western cultural values and traditions on learners of English. Rather, the problem must be due to forces outside the language (McKay 2002). Erling (2000) suggests that the responsibility lies first and foremost with textbook authors and publishers, since textbooks for the teaching of international English today look suspiciously similar to the textbooks of former generations that set out to teach 'the Queen's English'.

It seems that attempts to arrive at a completely culture-free language teaching would only bring us back to the times when language learning was seen as a question of learning the forms of the language, and not a question of learning language use in contexts in the real world. If one wants to focus on language in use, language as communication and language as social action language must, as we have seen, necessarily be embedded in cultural contexts. The question then is, of course, *which* contexts and which cultures the teaching of English should be tied to (Pulverness 2000).

So another way of solving the problem of undesirable cultural influence is to free the teaching of English from the contexts and the cultural references in which it has traditionally been taught. In fact, some scholars seem to use the term 'culture-free' about English language instruction that is not related to the communicative code and the cultural background of the countries traditionally associated with the language (Pölzl 2003).

English is a global language, but it is always realized in local contexts (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996). Many voices have thus been raised in favour of the need to show learners the diversity of the cultural contexts in which the English language can function (eg Nelson 1995; Pulverness 1999; Erling 2000; Scollon & Scollon 2001; Alptekin 2002; McKay 2002). This is where the obvious possibility lies to link English to *multiple* cultures and contexts and to open opportunities for all users of the language to relate it to their own cultural experience. Some instructional materials have also been designed around a content that refers to the learners' own local environments.

However, the English language certainly has its historical past, and it can be argued that it is important for learners to learn about and explore some of the connections between the language and the cultures of its native speakers. In this way, learners can be helped to see how language can promote specific ways of understanding the world and also promote certain 'modes of knowledge and behaviour' (Widdowson 2000: 194). Rather than imagining that one can engage in a seemingly 'culture-free' language education, this seems to be a fruitful way to go in order to develop the kind of critical language awareness that critical discourse analysts propose (see section 2.1.3).

2.2.3 The ideal of the native speaker

The notion of competence in a foreign language has traditionally been measured in terms of the ideal of the native speaker. In the case of English language instruction, British native speaker competence has, most often, been maintained as the ultimate goal (Kachru & Nelson 1996). The reason for this seems to lie in the belief that learners will benefit from mastering a variety of the language that will be well received in most contexts. Saville-Troike (1996) argues that most people will expect learners to use a rather 'formal' style and to avoid more 'marked' varieties of a foreign language.

This tradition has been criticized for several reasons. First of all, critical voices have pointed to the 'Robinson Crusoe effect' of English language education and to the fact that, if language learners accept the traditional links between English and Western

culture they become, themselves, a part of the imperialist tendencies that the teaching of English has been criticized for (Phillipson 1992; Kachru & Nelson 1996).[6]

Secondly, there has been a focus on the possible intimidating effects of accepting native speaker competence as an ideal. For foreigners, it has been argued, native speaker competence is neither a realistic nor a desirable goal. Instead, foreign language education ought to make learners aware of the power structures that are inherent in language use and to encourage them to become speakers 'in their own right' (Kramsch 1993).

The discussion of native speaker competence has thus been linked to questions of identity. American speakers of English do not want to sound British, the argument goes, so why would people from other nations (Kachru & Nelson 1996)? Clearly, if learners are given the opportunity to orient themselves about the different language communities that are available to them and to decide for themselves which segments of these communities they want to prepare themselves for, this will contribute to making language learning more relevant and also more motivating (Corbett 2003).

Last, but not least, the very notion of the native speaker has been questioned: 'Who is the native speaker' and 'what is his or her authority' (Paikeday 1985; Widdowson 1994)? The questions of native speaker authority have particular relevance in the case of English, not only because it has native speakers in all corners and social strata of the world, but also because so many varieties of the language are used for international communication. Widdowson (1994) makes the point that, as an international language, English must be independent of the custody of a particular group of native speakers. English language use is, and must be, diverse because it serves the communicative needs of so many different communities. Consequently, for many learners of English, the notion of native speaker competence must be seen as largely irrelevant (Kramsch 1998).

When this is said, it is obvious that some discourses 'count' more than others. Bourdieu (1977) describes the way in which language is 'authorized' by those who have the power to do so and how speakers with little authority need to struggle in order

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[6] The argument that the teaching of English has had a 'Robinson Crusoe effect' is discussed further in section 2.4.2.

to 'win' their audience or to reach a level of social and linguistic acceptability. He talks about linguistic competence as 'linguistic capital' to be used on a certain 'market'. Our chances of being listened to are unevenly distributed, according to our 'value' on the market. Bourdieu shows how issues of authority and power determine the conditions for the establishment of communication and how a person's eloquence constitutes only a part of what he or she brings to the communication situation. What speaks, Bourdieu says, 'is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person' (ibid: 653). For learners of a foreign language, then, it seems important to reflect on the characteristics of the 'markets' that they want to enter and what linguistic and social capital they need to develop in order to be accepted as worthy participants there.

In discussions of native speaker competence, the term 'non-native speaker' has often been used. However, this term can be seen to imply a deficiency and to highlight the fact that the speaker lacks native speaker competence. Therefore, several scholars have suggested other terms, such as 'the intercultural speaker' (Kramsch 1998) and 'the lingua franca speaker' (Pölzl 2003). These terms are positive in the way that they point to speakers with a different type of competence which is particularly useful and more relevant than native speaker competence in contexts of intercultural language use.

2.3 The role of curricular documents and textbooks

Many aspects of foreign language textbooks can, of course, be explained with reference to curricular requirements, and the present study therefore includes an investigation of the national curriculum on which today's textbooks are based (see Chapter 5). Section 2.3.1 provides the theoretical background for that discussion by pointing to some of the issues that can be addressed.

One of the main motivations for the present study lies in the fact that textbooks play a very central role in Norwegian foreign language classrooms. Section 2.3.2 discusses different aspects of this situation and points to some of the opportunities and the challenges that seem to be attached to the different roles that the textbook can have in the educational situation.

2.3.1 Curricular requirements

When discussing curricular requirements, it can be useful to distinguish between the terms *curriculum* and *syllabus.* While the latter is often used to refer to the aims and the content of a particular subject, the term curriculum most often refers to the wider educational context of the different subjects (Newby 2000). With reference to *L*-97, this means that the section that describes the teaching of English is the syllabus*,* while the document as a whole is the curriculum that presents the more general educational aims.[7] Thus, when looking for curricular guidelines and requirements related to questions of context and culture, there seems to be reason to investigate both the subject syllabus and the curriculum, as well as the degree of agreement between the two.

According to Newby (2000), foreign language syllabuses have three main functions. First of all, they clarify objectives, content and methods in an educational program. Secondly, they regularize and thus ensure a certain uniformity of content and expected outcomes. Thirdly, they can guide the process of teaching and learning. Widdowson (1990) has pointed out how clear principles seem to be the most important prerequisite for teachers and learners to be able to act upon a syllabus in a constructive way.

When it comes to references to questions of context and culture in a foreign language syllabus, then, the first issue that needs to be addressed is whether or not clear principles are presented for the students' work with such questions. Obviously, in order for this to happen, explicit statements need to be made in goal formulations and / or in the syllabus' descriptions of content and methods.

However, since most teaching programs will be designed so that they meet the evaluation requirements, the section in a syllabus that deals with assessment is also of great importance. Simensen (2001) claims that the evaluation system can, in fact, have a greater impact on daily work in the classroom than the goal formulations in the syllabus do. Although it may be difficult, and not even desirable, to assess students' attitudes towards other cultures, other parts of the students' work with questions of context and culture can certainly be evaluated. Thus, in order for a syllabus to clarify

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[7] The English version of *L-97* (*C-99*) uses this distinction of terms.

and to define the role that questions of context and culture are to play in the students' work with the foreign language, it seems important that these issues are reflected in the descriptions of the ways in which learners are to be assessed (Simensen 2001).

2.3.2 The role of textbooks in foreign language education

To my knowledge, no thorough investigation has been made of the amount of time spent on textbook-related work in Norwegian classrooms. Sigurgeirsson (1992) looked into the use of published materials in Icelandic classrooms and found that, in the English lessons, 96 percent of the time was spent working directly with the material, as compared to 75 percent of the time in mathematics and social studies. The material was, he writes, generally reviewed page by page. There is reason to believe that the situation regarding the use of textbooks in English is not much different in Norway (Heyerdahl-Larsen 2000).

One recent study shows that, in the implementation of the 1997 Norwegian National Curriculum, teachers use the curriculum as a point of reference when they make plans for the year or the semester. In the choice of topics and materials in the day-to-day work, however, the textbook plays the most crucial role (Hopmann, Afsar & Bachmann 2004). The most common situation in the teaching of English seems to be to let all students have one copy each of the same textbook, and to rely heavily on the textbook for the provision of teaching materials and procedures (Johnsen 1989).

Textbooks and teachers' dependence on textbooks have been criticized for a number of reasons. In the case of English, one area of dispute has been the idea that it is possible to produce textbooks for a global market, with the understanding that 'one-size-fits all' (Harmer 2001). Although Norway has a long and strong tradition of producing and using textbooks meant for Norwegian schools only, this perspective has, of course, some validity in this country as well. Language learning is such a complex undertaking that it does not seem feasible to expect a textbook to guide and cater for the whole process. No textbook author can ever anticipate all teachers' or learners' needs (McKay 2002).

Textbooks have also been criticized on the grounds that they present a set of already made decisions, often with some stamp of authority on them. A textbook that provides a self-contained teaching program can be seen as an obstacle for the teacher

who is trained and motivated to use creative and independent approaches in the classroom. Cortazzi & Jin (1999) refer to this role of the textbook as a possible 'de-skiller' of the teacher. Many warnings have been issued that the textbook may represent a limitation of the types of work that can take place in a learning situation, and some critics even refer to the textbook as a strait-jacket (Harmer 2001).

At the same time, many voices have been heard in favour of the textbook. Cortazzi & Jin (1999) list many positive roles that a textbook can have, ie that of a teacher, a map, a resource, and a trainer. As a *teacher*, the textbook can provide explanations and guide the learners through parts of the course, thus relieving the teacher of some of the time-consuming and tedious work, leaving him or her to focus on the parts of the job that only a teacher can do. As a *resource*, the textbook can provide teaching and learning materials as well as suggestions and ideas for the classroom, and thus facilitate the work that needs to be done to find suitable materials and approaches for a given group of learners. As a *trainer,* the textbook can provide step-by-step instructions for the inexperienced or untrained teacher.

The most important role that a textbook can have is, perhaps, that of *a map*. It seems obvious that all teaching programs and all classrooms need a map so that the involved parties have a shared understanding of the goals and the contents of the course. Such a map can, according to Hutchinson & Torres (1994), exist in the form of a written syllabus, as an idea in the teacher's head, or in a textbook. The latter option, they say, has great advantages since work will be facilitated when the teacher and the students agree on and understand the outline of the course.

Rather than seeing the structures and the contents that textbooks provide as a strait-jacket, then, these things can be seen as useful – and even necessary – bases for work with the subject. The competent and engaged teacher will use the textbook as a starting point, and as a proposal for action upon which he or she can make conscious and independent choices (Harmer 2001). Kramsch & Sullivan (1996) have shown how this can happen when competent teachers around the world *appropriate* the contents of the textbook so that it suits a given context and works for a specific group of students.

The different roles that a textbook can play in the teaching and learning situation may, of course, be a result of characteristics of the textbook itself and the

educational system of which it is a part. However, the role that a textbook has in any given situation also depends on the expectations and the capacities of the teachers and learners who use it. Most important here is probably the teacher's awareness of the textbook's many possible functions, not least of the possible limiting functions that it may have if it is used uncritically as a trainer, a 'pillow' (a de-skiller) or if it is looked upon as an unquestionable authority.

Although the view of learning has changed from the idea of instruction and the transmission of factual knowledge to more learner-based approaches, this does not necessarily mean that the textbook becomes less important, or less suitable as a central element in the classroom (Selander & Skjelbred 2004). In fact, several scholars claim that the textbook can have a particularly important role to play in times of change. Since the textbook also plays the role of an authority, it may provide the support that teachers need to be able to introduce new content, new approaches or new perspectives into the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin 1999). The textbook can function as a trainer and show teachers, gradually, how the new elements can be dealt with and also provide teachers with concrete examples of what the change might look like (Hutchinson & Torres 1994).

Since textbooks have such a strong position in Norwegian classrooms, it seems evident that they can have an important role to play in bringing the increased focus on questions of context and culture into the classroom. Textbooks can include examples of how the contexts of language can be worked with and how intercultural issues can be addressed, and also provide clear explanations and argumentation why these new perspectives should be incorporated in the teaching of English (Pohl 2001). Moreover, textbooks can provide valuable input when it comes to exposing students to new cultural expressions and to the diversity of cultures. Thus, the textbook can be an important factor in Norwegian schools both when it comes to implementing and legitimizing new practices in the foreign language classroom.

2.4 Dealing with questions of context and culture in foreign language education - a retrospective view

When investigating present-day objectives and practices in foreign language education, past traditions may be a valuable – and necessary – point of reference. In

the principles and ideas which have guided the teaching of foreign languages in earlier times, one may find explanations for practices that live on even today. In past traditions, one may also find both motivations for and obstacles to present-day developments. This section is therefore devoted to an investigation of the ways in which questions of context and culture have been dealt with in foreign language education in the past.

Section 2.4.1 looks at the tradition of teaching foreign languages separately from the contexts and cultures in which they can be used, while section 2.4.2 presents the long tradition of providing students with some information about the country or countries in which the foreign language is spoken. Section 2.4.3 discusses some of the new ways of linking language and culture studies that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.

The communicative approach brought with it a new perspective on questions of context and culture in foreign language education, and the role of socio-cultural issues in the development of the students' communication skills is dealt with in section 2.4.4. Section 2.4.5 looks at yet another important development, namely the influence from the field of intercultural communication studies.

The retrospective view of ways in which questions of context and culture have been dealt with in foreign language education is brought to a conclusion by way of a survey of earlier research that has been done on textbooks. Section 2.4.6 discusses some of the challenges related to work with questions of context and culture that this research has pointed out, and the theoretical perspectives presented here will function as central points of reference in the subsequent analysis of textbooks in the present study.

2.4.1 The traditional detachment of language, context and culture

Traditionally, foreign language learning has been a question of learning language *forms* and not a question of learning language *use* in particular socio-cultural contexts. Influence can be traced from the teaching of classical languages, which defined knowledge of the foreign language first and foremost as part of someone's formal education rather than as a preparation for practical language use (Stern 1983). Even with the reform movement and the shift of focus from written to oral language towards

the end of the 20th century, foreign languages were still taught detached from a social and cultural context. Stern (1983) points to influences from phonetics, linguistics and psychology from the late 1800s up till recent times as giving scientific backing to such an approach.

The two earliest documents that describe the teaching of English in Norway were issued in 1858 and 1865. They indicate that the subject followed the tradition from the teaching of classical languages and that the main emphasis was on grammar and translation (Valvo 1978). After this, the tradition of teaching English as an academic subject rather than as a living language has been a strong-lived one. One main reason for this seems to lie in the fact that, until the 1960s, English was an optional subject in Norwegian schools which functioned, most of all, as an entrance ticket to higher education (Gundem 1989). It is worth noticing, however, that although they have a primary focus on grammar and translation, the national curricula from 1885, 1911 and 1925 all have formulations that emphasize the fact that students should work, first and foremost, with examples of 'everyday language' (*C 1885*: 16, *C 1911*: 78; *C 1925*: 26).

Around World War II, language teaching theorists started to recognize anthropology and sociology as offering useful theoretical frameworks for the teaching of culture in connection with foreign language studies. American wartime language courses, for example, relied heavily on insights from anthropology for the teaching of foreign languages (Stern 1983). In the 1960s, all the leading works on language teaching theory in the United States focused on culture as a necessary component in foreign language education (eg Brooks 1964; Lado 1964; Rivers 1968). However, the new interest in the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching at this time was overshadowed by the influence from linguistics and the new technology of the language laboratory (Stern 1983).

There was in the 1960s a growing awareness of the interrelationship between language and culture. Brooks, for example, wrote this in 1964:

> Language is the most typical, the most representative, and the most
> central element in any culture. Language and culture are not separable; it
> is better to see the special characteristics of a language as cultural entities
> and to recognize that language enters into the learning and use of nearly

all other cultural elements. The detailed facts of culture cannot properly be evaluated in isolation but must be seen as integrated parts of the total way of life in which they appear (1964: 85).

But it seems that, although theorists were aware of the interrelationship between language and culture, very little was being done about bringing this insight into textbooks and into the teaching itself. There was at this time an increased split between the teaching of language as the acquiring of skills on the one hand and the teaching of literature and culture on the other. One consequence of this was that cultural insight was sometimes looked upon as 'a fifth skill', ie a component that could be added to and not integrated with the teaching of the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing (Damen 1987). In the 1980s, Stern (1983) writes, culture was still most commonly taught separately from language, and the focus was on non-linguistic features of the life of the society in question.

The separation between language forms and language use, between language skills and contexts of language use and between language and culture have been referred to as some of the 'dubious dichotomies' of foreign language education (Kramsch 1993). Still, the tradition has had a strong foothold in foreign language classrooms. In 1994, Pennycook still felt the need to call for 'reparation of the linguistic / semantic split occasioned by structuralist linguistics' (1994: 119). According to him, the separation of language from the social contexts in which it can be used has contributed to a type of language education that presents artificial language and fails to meet the students' need for practical language skills. In the words of Duranti (1997), grammarians have, up to the present day, contributed to the view that language learning is primarily a question of learning 'the rules of language as a game of chess' and failed to see the importance of learning 'the rules of language as a game of life' (1997: 334).

2.4.2 The teaching of culture as a separate discipline; 'Civilisation', 'Kulturkunde' and 'background studies'

Little has been written about the cultural component of foreign language education from a historical perspective. The two major works on the history of foreign language teaching written by British authors (Howatt 1984 and Hawkins 1987) do not mention

'culture' or related concepts explicitly at all. However, although the cultural dimension has not been given much attention, it is common knowledge that foreign language education has a long tradition of exposing students to the literature of the foreign country and of providing information about the relevant country and its people. This tradition can also be traced back to the teaching of the classical languages Latin, Greek and Hebrew (Kelly 1969). Since then, different aspects of the foreign country's culture have been emphasized, and the justification for doing so has varied.

When classical languages were taught, the main purpose was not to develop the students' practical language skills, but rather to provide them with an 'entrance ticket to the universal culture of the European educated elite' (Kramsch 1997: 5). This entrance ticket most often consisted of information about central elements in the country's cultural life and highlights in its history, as well as encounters with parts of the country's literary canon. This tradition was brought into the teaching of modern languages and, as early as in the 19th century, it became customary to link the teaching of a foreign language with some information about the foreign country, its history, culture and literature (Stern 1983).

Different countries have attached different philosophies to studies of culture in foreign language education. In the teaching of French, courses in 'civilisation' have a long tradition of actively trying to promote French culture. On the one hand, culture studies have been seen as a way to motivate people to learn French. On the other hand, the teaching of French in the former colonies has been done with the intention of 'helping' people there to become French, in line with the assimilation tradition from colonial times. Risager (1989) suggests that the strong emphasis on 'civilisation' in France can be linked to the decline in the country's economic and political status and also to the reduced importance of French as a language for international communication.

Germany has a long and interesting tradition of teaching 'Kulturkunde', as different approaches have been developed (Stern 1983). Between the wars, one approach focused on the teaching of the literature, history and geography of the foreign country, while another approach focused on the foreign country's history of ideas. Yet another type of Kulturkunde sought to discover the foreign country's 'mind'

underlying its historical events, current social state of affairs and cultural products. This last direction was, in the climate of the Nazi ideology, distorted to serving purposes of promoting prejudice and stereotypes about other countries. In fact, in the Hitler era, all teaching of Kulturkunde related to foreign languages was designed exclusively towards the appreciation of German culture and was openly ethnocentric. Thus, Stern says, the German tradition of including cultural questions can serve 'both as a lesson and as a warning' (1983: 247).

In the United Kingdom, culture studies have, most often, been referred to as 'background studies'. Risager (1989) suggests that the use of this term could reflect the long tradition in the United Kingdom of teaching English as an international language. In such a situation, she says, it would seem unnatural to link the language to any particular country or culture and background studies would, as the term suggests, be seen to have secondary importance only.

This view could certainly be contested, and many people would argue that, just as 'Frenchness' has been a central element in the teaching of French, 'Englishness' has in fact been very central in the teaching of English. Here, culture has most often been taught in the form of information about British and American history and cultural heritage. With the language, then, a lesson has been taught that mastery of the language also involves knowledge about – and a certain 'mastery' of - the culture that is, traditionally, associated with it.

On this basis, the global spread of English has been criticized as a means for certain Western, English-speaking countries to gain and maintain cultural, political and economic control over large parts of the world. Phillipson (1992) refers to the novel *Robinson Crusoe* as representing an emblematic instance in the long history of English education. He points to the fact that, when Crusoe set out to teach Friday English, he also assumed authority over the man and taught him a great number of things – other than language - that would make him useful to his master. Many scholars claim that this is a valid observation, and that English teachers perhaps always ought to ask themselves whether they might be following in Crusoe's footsteps (Pennycook 1998: 11).

In the teaching of English in Norway, there is also a long tradition of including cultural elements with the purpose of contributing to the students' knowledge. With only two exceptions, all Norwegian national curricula for primary and secondary school since 1925 mention knowledge about English-speaking countries as part of the English syllabus.[8] The 1925 National Curriculum writes about the need to provide students of English with some knowledge about 'the foreign country and its people', while later curricula refer cultural materials to 'England and America'. The 1974 curriculum introduces the term 'English speaking countries', a term which is used in the 1987 and the 1997 curricula also. However, as we shall see in Chapter 5, the primary focus on the United Kingdom and the United States is maintained even today.

In the teaching of English at Norwegian universities, there has been a tradition of offering separate courses in cultural issues, most often referred to as 'background studies'. According to Brøgger (1992), these courses have been problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, since information about culture has been taught separately from and with no references to other disciplines in the students' English studies, it has been unclear what the courses have been supposed to provide a background to. Secondly, in the development of these courses, questions of *what* and *how much* background knowledge students need have not been properly addressed. *Why* students have been expected to study culture as part of their foreign language studies has also been an open question. Thus, the field has appeared limitless, and topics have ranged from areas of sociology and history to political science. As a result of this, says Brøgger, many academics have developed a 'scholarly laissez-faire' attitude to the discipline (ibid: 16).

2.4.3 New developments: Linking language and culture studies

In the 1960s, culture entered foreign language education in new and different ways. The democratization of education in the 60s and 70s had led to increased emphasis on the development of the students' practical language skills, and the teaching came to center around language that could be used in situations of everyday communication. In

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[8] Knowledge about the English-speaking world is not mentioned in the 1939 curricula for the primary school in the cities ('byfolkeskole' (*C-1939 b*)) and in the country ('landfolkeskole' (*C-1939c*)).

this way, one could say that culture was taught in foreign language education in the form of the words and actions of everyday speakers in everyday life (Kramsch 1997).

However, teaching materials gave the impression that the situations described are, essentially, the same all over the world and that only one type of - universally valid - language and behavior would be needed to cope with them. Norwegian national curricula provide clear examples that this understanding was prevalent in Norway as well. The 1957 and 1964 curricula, for example, describe the teaching of language that will be useful in 'everyday situations'. No further specification is given of the nature of these situations, and the implication seems to be that they can be expected to be largely the same in a foreign cultural setting as they are in the students' own culture.

Not surprisingly, questions have been raised about the validity of the language and behavior presented and worked with, and the view that there are universal ways of understanding, talking about and relating to human experience has been severely criticized. Some linguists have pointed out that such an understanding is illusory, and that real language use always will be influenced by a variety of context-specific elements. Others have argued that the notion of universality is an imperialistic one, since it springs out of one cultural understanding of language use only and ignores the importance of other ways of organizing and understanding discourse (Phillipson 1992).

At the same time, there were many foreign language theorists at this time who wrote about the importance of including culture in a foreign language course. There seem to have been two different objectives for doing so. Some scholars stressed the view that, in order to learn and use a foreign language, one must learn about the cultural content that the language serves to communicate (Lado 1964). Other scholars linked cultural insight to the students' ability to communicate appropriately in situations of language use. Seelye (1984), for example, states this 'supergoal' for the teaching of culture:

> All students will develop the cultural understandings, attitudes and performance skills needed to function appropriately within a society of

the target language and to communicate with the culture bearer (1984: 49).[9]

In both cases, focus was on the culture of the native speaker of the language, and topics were related both to aspects of the native speaker's everyday life (an anthropological notion of culture) and to the country's 'high culture'. Such an all-encompassing notion of culture certainly gave rise to problems of selection, and several scholars entered the discussion in the 1960s and 1970s of ways to define what aspects of culture should be taught (Stern 1983).

Brooks (1964) suggests starting each class with a five-minute presentation in the foreign language of topics that bring out 'identity, similarity, or sharp difference in comparable patterns of culture'. He presents a long list of possible 'hors d'oeuvres' encompassing sociolinguistic topics, customs and rituals, personal relations and aspects of every-day life. Although he lists more than 60 topics, he claims that the list is 'by no means exhaustive' (ibid: 89).

Another influential scholar, Nostrand, makes a structured inventory of what to teach based on a description of the sociocultural system as a set of 'themes'. A theme, in Nostrand's terminology, is not a topic, but an 'emotionally charged concern, which motivates or strongly influences the culture bearer's conduct in a wide variety of situations' (1974: 277). French culture, for example, can in Nostrand's view be characterized in terms of twelve themes: individualism, intellectuality, the art of living, realism, common sense, friendship, love, family, justice, liberty, patriotism, and traditionalism.[10]

Despite these and other scholars' good intentions, the different suggestions for the selection and organization of cultural information seemed, to most foreign language educators, to be too haphazard to be of much help. Several of the categories in Brooks' list of hors d'oeuvres were also criticized for having too much of a North American flavor. Most important, however, was the fact that the principles for the teaching of culture in foreign language education were not clear enough. A common

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[9] Seelye's highly influential book first came out in 1974. My references are to the 1984 edition.

[10] The idea of focusing on the issues that the members of the culture in question attach most meaning to seems to point forward to the approach suggested by Brøgger (1992; see section 3.2.2).

result was that, when culture was taught at all, the materials and the teaching were often based on personal experience and 'a relatively improvised individual approach' (Stern 1983: 256). According to Byram & Esarte-Saries (1991), the teaching techniques that were developed in different countries depended more on serendipity and intuition than on an adequate didactic for the teaching of culture in foreign languages.

2.4.4 Socio-cultural issues and the communicative approach

In the 1980s, the teaching of foreign languages was heavily influenced by the development of what came to be known as the communicative approach to foreign language education. Based on insights from socio-linguistics and pragmatics, communicative language teaching focused on the need to develop the learners' ability to use the foreign language in social contexts, in culturally acceptable and appropriate ways. Thus, a clearer rationale for including questions of context and culture in the foreign language classroom seemed to emerge.

Communicative language teaching came to refer both to the goals for foreign language learning and to the processes in the classroom, and its most central concept was – and is – 'communicative competence' (Savignon 2000). The concept was developed, simultaneously, by foreign language scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, and Canale & Swain's (1980) description of the communicative approach became particularly influential (Simensen 1993).

In Europe, however, two Council of Europe publications became most central in clarifying the classroom implications of the new focus on the socio-cultural meaning of language and in promoting the communicative approach, namely *Scope* (van Ek 1986) and *Threshold Level 1990* (van Ek & Trim 1991[11]; Simensen 2001).[12] In *Threshold Level 1990*, 'socio-cultural competence' is presented as a necessary prerequisite for students to be able to communicate successfully in the foreign language, and foreign language courses are expected to make students familiar with

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[11] It should be noted that *Threshold Level 1990* was published in 1991.
[12] In these two publications, the term 'communicative competence' has been replaced by the term 'communicative ability', a concept which Simensen (2001) refers to as more realistic.

topics such as 'social conventions and rituals', 'politeness conventions' as well as other aspects of everyday life and interaction (1991: 103-109).

The descriptions of the communicative approach at this time indicate that the task for the foreign language learner is, first and foremost, to learn about and act according to the socio-cultural rules of one target language community. The *Threshold Level 1990,* for example, states that the information should be linked to 'the major, or one of the major, countries where the language is used as native language' (1991: 16). The authors argue for such a strategy because the learners' work needs to be aimed at 'the more predictable type of contact' with the language (ibid: 102). In order to prepare themselves for situations in which the foreign language is used as a lingua franca, however, the document also encourages learners to develop a certain 'alertness' to unexpected socio-cultural differences:

> Learners cannot take it for granted that their interlocutor will share either their own values, attitudes, beliefs and social conventions or those of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. They will need to be alert to signs of cultural difference, to be tolerant of such differences and be prepared to operate whatever strategies may be needed to establish a proper basis for communication by raising cultural differences into consciousness (ibid: 102).

The question of which country or culture(s) the development of the students' socio-cultural competence should be linked to is, of course, a fundamental – and rather problematic - one. It is worth noticing that the 2001 Council of Europe publication *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages,* in which the Council of Europe develops its view of communicative competence even further, upholds the tradition of focusing on native speaker 'target' cultures.[13]

In Norway, it is the English syllabus in the 1987 National Curriculum that reflects the principles of the communicative approach. 'Real communication' is a key word in this document, and students are encouraged to work with the language in ways that make them aware of the interplay between language and the contexts in which it is used. Students need to make choices in order to find words and phrases that are 'useful

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[13] This point will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2.1.

and acceptable' in any given situation, and the syllabus presents a list of language functions that is supposed to function as a basis for such work (*C-87*: 208).

However, by presenting such a list, the English syllabus in *C-87* seems to indicate that socio-cultural competence can be developed by traditional methods of practicing bits of language, isolated from the contexts in which they can be used. This approach can be referred to as a 'weak version' of the communicative approach, while a 'strong version' would focus on the ways in which language actually works in a given example of discourse (Holliday 1994).

Moreover, it is worth noticing that the new focus on appropriate language use in *C-87* is presented simply as an added element in the teaching of English, while existing principles for work with the language have been kept, unchanged, from earlier curricula. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the list of language functions is presented next to an even longer list of grammar points. The syllabus also maintains 'Knowledge about the English speaking world' as a central part of the students' work with English. Under this heading, topics are mentioned that clearly aim to provide students with factual information about countries in which the language is spoken, rather than with information that may contribute towards their socio-cultural competence.

Thus, the 1987 syllabus can be said to illustrate the tendency to introduce new ideas and principles without addressing the problem of how old ideas and principles can be abandoned or, at least, modified. Johnsen, Lorentzen, Selander & Skyum-Nielsen (1997) claim that this is a typical characteristic of the development of the teaching of English in Norway. In an investigation of English language textbooks for upper secondary schools in Norway, they trace influences from different approaches throughout the last century and argue that the teaching of English can be compared to a long train where new cars are attached, but old cars are never disconnected.

2.4.5 Influences from the field of intercultural communication studies

The field of intercultural communication studies emerged as a new area of enquiry in the early 1970s, based on previous research in the fields of anthropology, international relations and social psychology. In 1972, Samovar & Porter defined intercultural communication like this:

> Whenever the parties to a communication act bring with them different experiential backgrounds that reflect a long-standing deposit of group experience, knowledge and values, we have intercultural communication (1972: 1).

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in intercultural communication and intercultural training, which has manifested itself both in scholarly work and in practical training materials and courses. This is, of course, no coincidence in an era when globalization generates international contact, but leads to inevitable contradictions and conflicts as well. In their introduction to *Handbook of Intercultural Training* from 2004, the authors claim that 'the new millennium presents a time of great resistance to our work, as well as enormous need for it' (Landis, Bennett & Bennett 2004: 1).

Intercultural training programs aim to develop openness towards and insight into other cultures, to promote appreciation of cultural diversity and to help people overcome cultural bias and ethnocentrism. Work with intercultural understanding has been linked to challenges both on a small and on a large scale, ie both in personal experiences and in world affairs (Fennes & Hapgood 1997). However, although language plays a key role in all intercultural communication, a large amount of the work that is done in the field does not take language into consideration (Chamberlain 2000). The *Handbook of Intercultural Training* mentioned above, for example, mentions language learning and language use only in passing.

While interculturalists fail to address the fact that communication is mediated through a specific language, we have seen how foreign language education traditionally has dealt with culture as a separate field of study – if it has been dealt with at all - and ignored intercultural concerns. Thus, it can be argued that there is a great need for more holistic approaches to intercultural communication training, in which scholars of (foreign) language education and intercultural communication join forces (Fantini 1997).

Zarate (1982) was one of the first theorists to write about the encounter between cultures that can take place in foreign language education, and how cultural understanding is based not only on information about another culture, but also on reflection upon one's own culture. In the 1990s, the term 'intercultural' came to be

used more and more often in discussions of principles and procedures in foreign language education, especially in phrases like 'intercultural communication', 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural understanding'.

The term 'intercultural' can be said to indicate a movement away from the traditional focus in foreign language education on one 'target culture', and it seems to provide a new and different perspective on the foreign language learner as having to 'learn' a new culture. The term can also be said to point to the notion of the third space, ie the space *between* cultures that can be created for the negotiation of meaning when people from different cultures meet (see section 2.1.2.3).

Different objectives can be linked to work with intercultural issues in the realm of foreign language education. Insight into intercultural issues can, on the one hand, be seen as instrumental in the development of the students' communicative skills. The fact that intercultural contacts often lead to difficulties in understanding, bewilderment and even conflict indicates that learners of a foreign language need to develop strategies to deal with these things.

On the other hand, intercultural awareness can also be seen as a goal in itself, and the main concern could be to help students acquire the ability to empathize with other cultures and to develop attitudes of openness towards other cultures. In this view, foreign language education becomes part of a larger picture.

In fact, concepts of 'intercultural competence' and 'intercultural communicative competence' in foreign language education have often come to imply ideals beyond that of being able to communicate relatively successfully. It is claimed that intercultural competence has to do with one's ability to establish relations and 'to achieve and maintain a level of compliance among those involved' (Fantini 1997: 3). The same ideals can be seen in the description of 'the intercultural speaker', the embodiment of a new goal for learners of a foreign language. The intercultural speaker, it is said, is committed to turning intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships, and he or she is able to stand between and 'mediate' between different cultures (Byram & Zarate 1997; Sercu 2002).

Different approaches have been presented as to how intercultural issues should be incorporated in foreign language education. Byram (1997), for example, suggests

that intercultural questions can be dealt with in isolation, in order to develop the students' 'intercultural competence'. According to Byram, intercultural competence encompasses attitudes, values, knowledge and skills related to foreign cultures, and it can be worked with as an added – and not an integrated – element in foreign language education. It can be linked to situations of foreign language use, but it is also useful in situations that do not include the use of a foreign language, for example in cultural encounters in one's own language and when making sense of a dubbed television program. Byram describes intercultural competence in much detail and formulates objectives that are meant to function as a basis for assessment.[14]

Another approach links cultural and intercultural questions directly to work with the language itself, and language is seen to be the key issue to focus on if one wants to improve one's chances of success when crossing cultural borders. The underlying argument is that it is, first and foremost, in language that differences in culture manifest themselves (Duranti 1997). Especially for the learner of a foreign language, it seems imperative that these manifestations are explored and dealt with.

One main influence comes from the field of discourse analysis. Here, culture is seen as too broad a term to use when analyzing differences in language use, and the term 'discourse system' is introduced instead (Scollon & Scollon 2001). Discourse systems can be explained as 'envelopes of language' that enfold different groups of people and the ways in which they use language together. Such groups can, for example, be related to gender, age, profession, geographical background and ethnicity. Each discourse system has its own communicative style and its own norms and ideas as to how communication should happen, and being a part of one discourse system will make it more difficult to interpret those who belong to other systems. However, since we are all members of different groups, we constantly have to move from one discourse system to another.

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[14] When intercultural competence is combined with communicative competence the result is, in Byram's terminology, intercultural communicative competence. In much other theory on foreign language education the distinction between the two types of competencies is not maintained, and the two terms intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence are used interchangeably.

We are not aware of the ways in which we move and adapt, because the self-evident nature of a particular discourse system tends to make the other discourse systems invisible. It is only when we find ourselves faced with completely new discourse systems that we become aware of the challenges that moving from one discourse system to another may involve. Meeting and communicating with people from a different culture, then, may bring differences in discourse systems to the fore. But it can be argued that the challenges we face in such situations are not fundamentally different from the challenges we face when we use our own language. We find ourselves caught between the values, norms and practices of different discourse systems every day, in our day-to-day communication. In this view, *all* communication, even in one's own language is, to some extent, *interdiscourse communication* (Scollon & Scollon 2001).

As mentioned in section 2.1.2.3, this perspective seems to indicate that cultural differences can be explored in encounters between people from different segments of one's own society and that issues of interdiscourse communication can be highly relevant in work with one's mother tongue as well. However, this does not reduce the relevance of the argument for foreign language education. On the contrary: if lines are difficult to cross between discourse systems in one's own language, there is no reason to think that having to deal with a foreign language and foreign situational and cultural contexts would make it any easier.

One main reason to link work with intercultural issues directly to the students' work with the language lies in the fact that it is in alternative forms of communication and in the words, structures and idioms of a foreign language that other ways of understanding reality can be seen (Fantini 1997). Although one can learn many things in one's native language about other ways of being and seeing, and although one can experience expressions of culture through a variety of senses it is, ultimately, through a foreign language that one can get access to fundamentally new ways of perceiving the world.

Another reason can be found in the fact that language is a much easier entity to come by and make the object of scrutiny than culture is (Fantini 1997). Thus, the investigation of texts can probably be more concrete and focused than the study of

different aspects of contexts and cultures, detached from actual language use. In texts, one can examine the issues that are at stake in situations of intercultural language use and try to analyze the reasons why misunderstandings occur.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the national curriculum from 1997 introduces intercultural issues as an element in the teaching of English in Norwegian schools. While the English syllabus in *L-97* links intercultural issues, first and foremost, to the development of the students' practical language skills, it also emphasizes the need for students to develop attitudes of respect and tolerance towards other cultures. Chapter 5 provides a more thorough discussion of the references to cultural and intercultural questions in *L*-97.

2.4.6 Theoretical perspectives in earlier research on questions of context and culture in foreign language textbooks

A central issue that can be investigated in textbooks for the teaching of English as a foreign language is, of course, which countries and cultures they deal with. Research indicates that there are three different trends here. Most textbooks focus on the two countries that have, traditionally, the closest links with the language, namely the United Kingdom and the United States. But some textbooks exist that teach English as an international language. The texts here provide information about a number of different cultures in and outside the English-speaking world, and situations are presented that exemplify the use of English as a lingua franca (Cortazzi & Jin 1999).

The third group of textbooks link the teaching of English to the students' own culture. The rationale for this is that students will need foreign language skills, first and foremost, to talk about themselves and their own background (Pulverness 2000; Alptekin 2002). In addition, some of these textbooks are made so that they will help students become aware of their own cultural identity. Examples of such textbooks can, according to Cortazzi & Jin (1999), be found in Venezuela, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Research has also pointed out how some textbooks focus on 'culture-general' rather than 'culture-specific' issues (Damen 1987). Textbooks that focus on culture-specific issues set out to teach students about particular foreign cultures or to prepare them for encounters with particular cultural groups. Textbooks that deal with culture-general issues are primarily concerned with cultural universals and the ways in which

culture, as human adaptive behavior, can be understood as a universal phenomenon. In addressing the similarities of human problems around the world and the different ways in which these problems are solved, these books also aim to promote cultural understanding and feelings of empathy for 'the other' (Damen 1987).

Several textbook analyses point to the fact that the cultural universe described in the foreign language textbook may not represent the foreign culture at all. Andersen & Risager (1981) describe beginners' textbooks for the teaching of French and claim that many of the dialogues in these books take place in a 'socially and materially undetermined situation'. Henriksen (1995), in describing textbooks for the teaching of French, German and English in Norway one hundred years ago, argues that most of the texts reflect 'a culturally neutral universe'. These scholars point to the fact that, when textbooks teach everyday language that can be used in everyday situations, the underlying assumption is that such situations are the same in all cultural contexts.

Kramsch (1988) argues that, although this may seem to be the case, many texts in fact convey frames of reference that belong to the students' own culture. In examining eight first-year college textbooks of German in the United States, she found that most of the texts are based on the assumption that German and American culture are basically the same. Thus, she concludes that 'What is being taught here is American culture in German words, not German culture' (ibid: 80). On the basis of this insight, Kramsch calls for an *explicit* focus in foreign language textbooks and foreign language teaching on manifestations of culture. Only then, she says, will it be possible for students to learn about the foreign culture and about their own culture, and to examine and explore the borders between the two (Kramsch 1993).

The presentation of specific target cultures in foreign language textbooks has also been criticized. Most common is the criticism that the picture provided of the foreign country is superficial, unstructured and unrealistic in the way that only a glossy tourist picture is shown. Beginners' books for the teaching of French in Denmark, for example, are said to show nothing of the great social variation in France. The topics seem to have been selected in a haphazard way, and the authors give no explicit reasons for their choices. The textbook characters all come from the middle class, and there are no social problems of any kind. All social relationships are smooth, and

personal relationships are only depicted as friendly and idyllic (Andersen & Risager 1979; Andersen & Risager 1981; Risager 1991).[15]

A Norwegian study of English textbooks for the beginners' and lower secondary level in the 1970s reports of the same tendencies, as these books are also said to present only 'harmless' and non-controversial topics (Breidlid 1979). Breidlid argues that the teaching of English is not related to the development of international awareness in the learners, and he calls for new national curricula to require that this be done.[16]

Exercises that appear just to provide language practice and drill, may also provide less than desirable pictures of the foreign country. Kramsch (1988) gives this example from a textbook for the teaching of German in the United States of how grammar exercises can function as a reinforcement of one-sided and stereotypical information:

> Say that you are for the same thing:
> - I am for democracy. - What are you for?
> - Frau Strauss is against state amateurs. - Against whom is she? […]
> - Few people doubt that East German sports show a successful mixture of leninist marxism, strong nationalism and German thoroughness. […]
> - What do East German sports show? (1988: 82)[17]

Byram (1989) discusses a textbook for the teaching of French, published in the early 1980s, for use in English comprehensive schools. His conclusions echo those of Andersen & Risager and Breidlid as he shows how the book gives a superficial picture of France and that topics are presented in an unstructured and unconnected way. The learners are prepared for short tourist visits to France but, Byram claims, the images we are given remind us more than anything of a royal visit, 'since it seems a fair assumption that only a royal visit would run so smoothly without glimpsing less

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[15] The books in Andersen & Risager's study were published between 1952 and 1973. Risager (1991) does not identify the textbooks analyzed, but states that most of them have been produced in Sweden since the 1950s.

[16] In Norway, most studies of foreign language textbooks have focused on their linguistic content or methodological approach, and research on questions of context and culture in these textbooks is largely non-existent. Studies that focus on the linguistic content of English language textbooks in Norway are, for example, Lullau (1996), Marolf-Natlandsmyr (1997) and Nielsen (1997), which are all unpublished 'hovedfag' theses. There are also a number of 'hovedfag' theses that deal with the methodological approach in English textbooks, for example Valvo (1978), Knutsen (1983), Lunde (1992), Tvete (1992), Johansen (2001) and Lia (2001). Gundem (1989) also discusses some aspects of the methodological approach in textbooks.

[17] Kramsch presents this example in English, and the translation is, apparently, hers.

attractive and more mundane features of French life' (1989: 125). Mennecke (1993) refers to similar problems in German textbooks for the teaching of English. He claims that the textbooks present 'an unconvincing "land that never was"' and that they are 'conflict-free and harmonizing ad nauseam' (1993: 47).

Byram points out that providing students with positive images of a country and people does not necessarily promote positive attitudes in the learners towards the foreign society. Thus he calls, with Andersen & Risager (1979, 1981) and Risager (1991) for a more realistic rendering of foreign countries and people. Risager (1991) argues that, in order for students to be able to relate to the foreign country and feel the need for further contact with people there, they need to be provided with pictures of the foreign country that they can recognize as realistic and believable. The main ingredient in a realistic picture is, to Risager, the presentation of 'real people', ie people in the foreign country who come to life as believable human beings with 'feelings, attitudes, values and perceived problems' (1991: 183). Risager calls for textbooks to present a representative selection of people from different age groups, social and occupational affiliations, geographical environments and situations of interaction in what she refers to as 'micro level' texts.

Principles for the selection of information about foreign countries have been dealt with by a number of scholars. Doyé (1991) and Byram (1993), base their joint research project on the claim that the picture given of a foreign country should be 'representative'. By this they mean that the foreign country should be covered in terms of a wide variety of topics related both to the country's history, cultural heritage, everyday life and behavior, and shared values and beliefs. They conclude their analysis of eight German textbooks for the teaching of English and five English textbooks for the teaching of German by indicating that the books used in Germany are more uniform – and more satisfactory – in terms of their cultural content than the books used in England. This result is attributed to the German 'Kulturkunde' debate and long tradition of including socio-cultural information in textbooks. The list of topics, which Doyé and Byram refer to as a 'minimum content', is developed further by Byram & Morgan (1994) and will be presented in section 3.2.2.

In order to help students develop skills and insights related to the cultural aspect of communication, Sercu (1998) argues that both the content and the teaching approaches of the textbook need to be 'pupil appropriate'. By this she means that the topics dealt with should be perceived as interesting and relevant among the students. The exercises should encourage student involvement, and the students should be invited to actually process the information presented and to develop the ability to reflect on and think independently both about cultural manifestations and the communication process. Sercu arrives at this conclusion after having analyzed textbooks for the teaching of German in Flemish secondary schools, where textbook analysis and student interviews are brought together.

Sercu, with reference to Risager (1991), also describes the importance for textbooks to model possible forms of contact with the foreign culture, so that the learners' own experiences and perceptions may be addressed and the world presented to them may appear as one to which they can relate. In her investigation of textbooks for the teaching of German in Flanders, she found the following situations of contact presented: living in Germany, visiting friends, correspondence, exchange program, family, and contact through the media. She stresses the importance of showing how people from different cultural backgrounds 'have to
apply intercultural skills in order to cope with misunderstandings arising from differences in cultural background, as well as feelings of fear, distrust or even disgust' (1998: 383).[18]

When it comes to the textbooks' ability to prepare students for appropriate language use in different contexts, several studies have pointed to severe shortcomings here. The main tendency seems to be that textbooks fail to provide students with texts that can exemplify 'authentic' language in interaction.[19] There is also a lack of comprehensible and explicit comments and explanations that could help students develop insight into conversational norms and practices (Bardovi-Harlig et al 1991; Boxer & Pickering 1995; Grant & Starks 2001; Wong 2001). Moreover, textbooks

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[18] However, in her investigation she found that only 1.5 percent of the total space devoted to cultural information in the textbooks dealt with intercultural encounters.
[19] The question of authenticity will be followed up in section 3.5.1.

have been criticized for showing none of the great linguistic diversity of the foreign country (Andersen & Risager 1981).

With reference to an investigation of eight top-selling EFL and ESL textbooks for the international marked, Vellenga (2004) argues that foreign language textbooks still have a long way to go before they can contribute much to the development of the students' pragmatic competence. Research is needed, she says, in the fields of conversation analysis and cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics in order for adequate textbook materials to be developed. Vellenga (2004) links up with Kramsch's (1993) call for an explicit focus on questions of context and culture when she says that textbooks, more than anything, need to include metalinguistic and metapragmatic information related to the textbook texts. Only then will students be given the tools to recognize and analyze language in a variety of contexts.

3 Dealing with questions of context and culture in foreign language education – some perspectives

This chapter follows up the perspectives presented in Chapter 2 and relates them to the challenges that need to be addressed and the choices that can be made when trying to incorporate questions of context and culture in foreign language education. Since teaching materials in the form of textbooks are the primary concern of the present study, the discussion is related, first and foremost, to the choices that can be made and the questions that may need to be addressed when designing and developing such materials.

A main focus in this chapter is to clarify the connection between the choices of materials and approaches that can be made and the objectives that can be linked to them. It seems obvious that a clear understanding of the rationale for bringing questions of context and culture into a foreign language course is a necessary prerequisite both for a qualified selection of materials and for effective work with them (Widdowson 1990).

The chapter starts by summing up the different objectives that can be linked to work with questions of context and culture in a foreign language course and argues that, no matter which objective one has in mind, there is a need to keep an explicit focus on such questions (section 3.1). Section 3.2 follows up this general perspective and looks into some of the considerations that need to be addressed when selecting cultural material for a foreign language course.

In section 3.3, the perspective is narrowed down to the type of work that can be done in order to develop the students' ability to use the language appropriately in different situations, while section 3.4 explores the challenges that the new focus on intercultural learning as part of foreign language education may entail. Section 3.5 provides a closer look at some of the issues that may need to be considered when selecting different types of text in a foreign language textbook.

Section 3.6 brings the chapter to a close by looking into the students' own positions and the ways in which they can be expected to work with and relate to the textbook materials. Central issues here are the balance between school authority and

learner autonomy, and the possibilities for learners to define their own needs and to develop their own voice as users of the foreign language.

3.1 Basic considerations: objectives and focus

3.1.1 Main objectives linked to work with questions of context and culture

Chapter 2 established that, in foreign language learning theory and in teaching materials, three main objectives have been linked to work with questions of context and culture in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. Since the following discussion uses these objectives as a point of reference, I will recapitulate them, briefly, here.

First of all, it has been customary to provide students with 'background' knowledge about some of the countries in which the foreign language is spoken. This has been done in order to contribute to the students' general education as well as to inform them about cultural references that may be relevant and useful in situations of language use. Cultural information has also been used as 'carrier content' in order to appeal to the students' interests and to motivate them for language learning.

Another concern has been to provide students with insight into situational and cultural contexts and different conventions of language use. Here, cultural questions have been brought into the foreign language classroom as an aid in the development of the students' foreign language skills and of their ability to use the language appropriately.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to foreign language education as a natural and important arena for the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural skills. Students are expected to develop attitudes of respect and understanding for other cultures and also to get new insight into their own cultural background. Such insight will, naturally, be useful in situations of foreign language use, but the rationale for including intercultural issues is often linked to objectives beyond those of the communication situation as well.

3.1.2 Explicit focus on questions of context and culture; culture-specific reference

It was shown in Chapter 2 that there is a long tradition of incorporating cultural topics in a foreign language course. Most often, the main emphasis has been on providing students with information about the country or countries in which the foreign language is spoken, and many texts have, clearly, provided factual information in a direct and conspicuous way. Other texts, however, (textbook dialogues in particular) have had a tendency to reflect a 'culturally neutral universe' (Henriksen 1995; see section 2.4.6). Culture has been considered transparent, or the situational context for the text has been – tacitly – presented as universally valid. In fact, it has been argued that foreign language textbooks often have conveyed the students' own contexts and frames of reference (Kramsch 1988, 1997).

With this in mind, there is good reason to consider the degree to which and the ways in which foreign language textbooks refer to specific cultural contexts. It seems obvious that, in order for students to be able to learn about different cultures and to develop an awareness of the impact that questions of context and culture can play in a communication situation, aspects of context and culture need to be made visible for them, and these aspects also need to be pointed out and worked with explicitly (Kramsch 1993).

In order for this to happen, it seems important that the textbook texts include references that make it possible for the reader to place the texts in specific cultural contexts. Introductions, exercises and questions that accompany the texts also have a role to play here. Such texts can provide extra information related to aspects of context and culture in the text. Even more importantly, these texts can draw the students' attention to and encourage them to work with and to reflect on questions of context and culture as part of their work with the foreign language.

The call for an explicit focus on questions of context and culture can also be applied to the ways in which the objectives for work with such questions are communicated. While curricular documents have a crucial role to play here, it seems just as important that textbooks and teaching materials make it absolutely clear what the objectives linked to the different materials and approaches are.

The teacher's guides and the authors' introductions to the textbooks would be natural places to look for information about the objectives of a course. But signals about the purpose of the material are also sent in the textbook authors' commentaries to and statements about the different texts and exercises. At the same time, the function and the 'status' of questions of context and culture in a foreign language textbook are also, of course, communicated directly through the selection of text, topics and exercises. Thus, there is good reason to consider carefully *what* material one selects for a foreign language textbook and also *how* this material is presented.

3.2 Work with cultural material

I argued in Chapter 2 that the notions of text and context can be seen as parts of a cycle, in which all elements both within and around the text work together in constituting the meaning of the text (see section 2.1.1). It may therefore seem strange to single out different parts of the context and deal with them separately, as I do when focusing primarily on cultural questions in this section and on different ways of understanding and dealing with the situational context in section 3.3. Nevertheless, in order to be able to cast light on the many perspectives that can be taken on work with questions of context and culture and to discuss the many objectives that can be linked to such work, I have found it useful to do just that.

Thus, the following section looks into some of the considerations that can be related to the choice of cultural material in a foreign language course. What are the options when it comes to the selection of cultures and topics, and what may the rationale behind some of the most frequent choices in foreign language education be? Some of the points could apply to the teaching of any foreign language at any level, but my main focus in the following discussion is – in accordance with the investigation of textbooks in Chapters 6 - 10 - on the teaching of English in Norwegian lower secondary school.

3.2.1 Which countries and cultures to focus on?

The teaching of English has, traditionally, been linked to cultural information about the United Kingdom and the United States. Even today, one could argue that students of English ought to learn about these countries and about their strong position in the

English-speaking world. But one could also claim that it is high time to question this tradition and to investigate alternatives when it comes to the choice of countries and cultures. Above all, it seems necessary to clarify the links between the countries and cultures selected for presentation and the purpose of the education (Melchers & Shaw 2003).

In the teaching of English in Norway, there are several reasons why it could be natural to maintain the tradition of focusing on the United Kingdom and / or the United States. Since most Norwegians already have a considerable amount of background knowledge about these countries and many of them probably are motivated to learn more, information about the United Kingdom and the United States may seem to be a natural choice when it comes to selecting a 'carrier content' for English courses (McKay 2002).

If appropriate language use is the main objective for bringing cultural questions into the foreign language classroom, the ideal situation would be, of course, to know exactly which situational and cultural contexts the students need to be prepared for. Usually, however, it is impossible to predict which arenas of language use learners will be most likely to enter and, as we have seen, the diversity of cultures will always make it necessary for language users to be prepared to cope with a variety of discourse systems. Thus, it can be argued that a natural option would be to provide learners with insight into one specific culture which can exemplify some of the issues that need to be considered in situations of intercultural communication (Byram 1997). It is, perhaps, this view that is reflected in the Council of Europe publication *The Threshold Level* when it states that students should be prepared for 'the more predictable type of contact' (van Ek 1991: 102). The same view can be seen in the 2001 publication *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* when it maintains the focus on language use in one specific target culture (Council of Europe 2001).

There is extensive contact between Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States both in people's private and professional lives. Therefore, work with some of the challenges that contact with British or American people might entail would probably feel relevant to most Norwegians. Another - and perhaps just as important - reason to focus on these countries in the teaching of English in Norway is

the ample supply of British and American movies and television programs that can serve as sources for work with language use in context and for the exploration of conventions of language use (Scollon 1999).

At the same time, since Norwegians may use English in an infinite number of different contexts, in interaction with people from any country in the world, it could be argued that it is important to provide students with an alternative to the traditional Anglocentric orientation of the teaching of English. When a country outside the English-speaking world is focused on, this gives the students an opportunity to experience and explore some of the contexts in which English can be used as a lingua franca and also to free themselves from native speaker norms (McKay 2002).

It must also be remembered that English plays a totally different role in today's world than it did just some decades ago. Certainly, there are more than 300 million native speakers who come from countries in the 'inner circle' of English language use (ie the United Kingdom, the United States, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand).[20] But there are almost as many speakers in the 'outer circle' countries, ie countries in which English is used as an important second language (Crystal 1995). The largest number of speakers, however, can probably be found in yet a different group of countries. Kachru (1985) places these countries in 'the expanding circle', thus indicating that the number of people who use English as a lingua franca is on the increase. Crystal (1995) suggests a number that will, in the foreseeable future, reach 1,000 million.

These figures indicate that, today, English is of great importance in many more countries than the ones traditionally associated with the language. Also, the great increase in speakers of English as an international language indicates that interaction in English can soon happen between members of virtually any community on the face of the earth. As the importance of English in the 'outer' and 'expanding circle' countries increases, the traditional ties between English and the inner circle countries will change and may need to be reconsidered. This situation can be said to place both the English language and the content that can go with it in a totally new perspective,

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[20] The terms 'inner circle', 'outer circle' and 'expanding circle' are Kachru's (1985).

and open for a situation in which any content related to any culture could be considered relevant in an English classroom (Nelson 1995).

Another reason to break with the tradition of linking the teaching of English to British and American culture can be found in the view that English language teaching has had an imperialistic effect. There has been an increased awareness in recent years of the fact that English educators often have imposed Western values and behavior on their language students and their role has been compared to that of Robinson Crusoe (see section 2.4.2). While teachers may have felt unease about this situation, learners around the world have begun to refuse to accept the role of Friday (McKay 2002). This, then, is a situation that clearly calls for a rethinking of the cultural content that the teaching of English should convey.

There is, however, no denying the fact that mastery of British and American language and culture has high prestige in most contexts. From this perspective, it seems important to be able to help learners master the discourses that will be useful for them. This does not mean, however, that students should be expected to just accept different cultural traits and try to adopt them as their own (Kramsch 1993). Rather, it should be possible to socialize learners into a specific social discourse and at the same time provide them with critical insight so that they can 'resist' and 'defend' themselves and others against that discourse (Halliday 1996: 357). In other words, it should be possible to find a balance between the accommodation for the learners' obvious needs to become proficient in dominant forms of language and culture on the one hand and for their needs to be able to speak with their own voice on the other (Pennycook 1999).

When it comes to the third objective for bringing cultural questions into foreign language teaching, namely intercultural awareness and intercultural skills, it has been argued that a good starting point would be to provide information about one country in which the language is spoken natively (Byram 1997). This information should clearly present 'the other', and be used as an example and as a point of reference in the students' continued efforts to understand other cultures and to cope with new situations.

A more useful approach, however, seems to lie in Kramsch's (1997) claim that students need to be exposed to a variety of 'others'. By presenting *many* new ways of understanding, thinking and speaking about one's surroundings, foreign language education can provide the 'imaginative leap' that will enable students to see that different cultures represent equally valid ways of looking at the world. Focusing on the arbitrary nature of culture, Kramsch says, is perhaps the best tool in developing new perspectives on one's own cultural ways and thus counteracting prejudiced attitudes and ethnocentrism.

Also, if intercultural awareness is the objective, it seems that students need to be invited to explore the differences and the boundaries between several cultures, with a view both to foreign cultures and to their own (Kramsch 1993). A fruitful approach may be found in the description of cultural encounters, which can be used as a starting point for the exploration of cultural differences and for reflection on the issues that such encounters may imply (Cortazzi & Jin 1999). At the same time, there is always reason to remember that a clear demarcation of 'us' and 'them' as separate cultural groups is a problematic issue and certainly not a very constructive approach in situations where cultures meet.[21]

It was mentioned in section 2.4.6 how one approach in textbooks for the teaching of English has been to focus on the students' own cultural background in order to help students talk about their own culture in English and to strengthen the sense of their own identity. Some of the content in a foreign language course can, of course, be selected in order to meet this objective. When this is done, however, there is reason to remember that, like most cultures, 'the students' own culture' is quite diverse. Even in a homogenous society like Norway, many communities and many classrooms are characterized by considerable cultural diversity (Kulbrandstad 2003), and it can be argued that there is great potential for intercultural learning here. Work with the different cultures that are represented in the students' immediate environment will probably be experienced as quite relevant for the students, as 'real' cultural encounters can be focused on and explored.

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[21] This perspective will be followed up in section 3.4.2.

Since most textbooks used in Norwegian classrooms have been written and produced specifically for Norwegian schools, it seems that the textbook itself can be a natural resource for work that aims to develop the students' insight into their own cultural patterns and understandings. By investigating the materials and approaches that are selected and presented here, students can probably be helped to develop an outsider's perspective on some of the assumptions and frames of reference upon which their own learning situation is built (Cunningsworth 1995).

3.2.2 Which topics to select?

The different objectives for work with cultural questions can be seen to be interrelated, and topics that are chosen in order to achieve one goal may, clearly, contribute towards another. However, this does not mean that rather incidental work with randomly chosen cultural topics - which seems to have been encouraged by some earlier textbook series – will promote effective learning. Clearly, topics need to be selected in accordance with principles that reflect the objectives that are linked to the students' work with them. But in such a situation, too, the process of choosing topics from a seemingly unlimited field is not an easy one. In the following, I will therefore present and discuss some principles that have been suggested in order to guide the selection process.

The long tradition of exposing foreign language students to aspects of the target country's 'high culture' must, first and foremost, be attributed to the desire to provide students with 'an entrance ticket to the educated elite' (Kramsch 1997). In this tradition, the authority to define the contents of the education lay, naturally, with those who already were in possession of such a ticket, and the selection of topics seems to have been based on the assumption that there is a common and shared understanding among the members of the educated elite of what the main elements of a country's 'high culture' are.

Today, a much broader perspective is taken on the type of topics that can be relevant for a foreign language student. The Council of Europe publication *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), for example, claims that, in addition to cultural knowledge that will help them interpret the context and the cultural references in a communication situation, students also need 'knowledge of the world'

in order to have something worthwhile to talk about at all. Factual knowledge about the country or countries in which the language is spoken is seen to be particularly important in this connection. But the document leaves the question of selection open and specifies such information only with reference to the countries' 'major geographical, environmental, demographic, economic and political features' (2001: 102).

In response to this problem – and the unfortunate result of it that can be seen in the fragmentary and seemingly arbitrary presentations that many foreign language textbooks provide, scholars have called for pictures that are 'representative' (Doyé 1991; Byram 1993; Byram & Morgan 1994). By this they mean that, if a foreign country is to be presented at all, a whole range of topics should be covered, and both positive and less positive traits of the country should be included. Byram & Morgan (1994) describe the following content areas which, to them, constitute a 'minimum content' of any foreign language course:

- Social identity and social groups
- Social interaction
- Belief and behaviour
- Socio-political institutions
- Socialization and the life-cycle
- National history
- National geography
- National cultural heritage
- Stereotypes and national identity (ibid: 51-52).

Although the reminder to present 'representative' pictures of foreign countries can be said to be a timely one, the list of topic areas that Byram & Morgan introduce here may not be of much help. It seems obvious that only quite extensive courses would have a chance of covering all the areas suggested and that most foreign language courses would face the choice of either providing a 'representative picture' by way of brief, easily digestible bits of information or of going more deeply into a few, particularly relevant topics.

In either case, the problems related to the selection, the presentation and, not least, the justification of cultural topics do not seem to be solved. Thus, it could be argued that the main asset of Byram & Morgan's list is that it indicates the great scope

of topics that can be relevant for anyone who wants to learn about a foreign country. As such it can be said to point towards the conclusion that it is unrealistic to expect a foreign language course to provide this type of extensive information.

Brøgger (1992) points to a quite different solution to the problem of selection, in suggesting that factual information about a country, as a sort of side order to foreign language instruction, should be done away with altogether. The only valid reason to work with cultural questions in a foreign language course, he argues, is to support and link up with the development of the students' communication skills. In order to be able to communicate with people from another culture, he says, students need to get access to the cultural competence that these people have. If the learners have insight into the cultural knowledge, values, beliefs and assumptions that their interlocutors have, it will be easier for them to understand the cultural references that can be made in a communication situation.

The obvious place to start, Brøgger says, is with the 'dominant culture patterns', ie the aspects of the foreign culture that are most central in constituting the members' 'collective cultural identity' (1992: 37-38). Thus, Brøgger suggests that foreign cultural traits and phenomena should not be studied per se, but rather in terms of the *meaning* that they have for the members of a given culture. When learning about the United States, for example, one could focus on issues such as Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the Declaration of Independence, with reference to the fact that these issues are central in the country's self representation and that, in fact, these are texts that most Americans know by heart (ibid: 95).[22]

Other attempts have also been made to define the type of knowledge that can support the development of the students' communication skills. Risager (1987), for example, underlines the need to learn about everyday life in the foreign country and, not least, the 'do's and the don'ts' of the foreign culture. The *Common European Framework* mentioned above states that students need to develop 'socio-cultural knowledge', and presents possible topics under the headings 'everyday living', 'living

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[22] As indicated in section 2.4.3, Brøgger's argument seems to reflect the focus on a foreign culture's 'emotionally charged concerns' suggested by Nostrand (1974).

conditions', 'interpersonal relations', 'values, beliefs and attitudes', 'body language', 'social conventions' and 'ritual behavior' (Council of Europe 2001: 102-103).

Since they focus on the students' communicative needs, all these approaches indicate a clear principle for the selection of cultural topics and, thus, they narrow down the scope of topics that can be dealt with in a foreign language course. Yet, there seem to be problems attached to these approaches, too. First of all, they can be said to pursue the understanding that students need, first and foremost, to be prepared for language use in one target culture. As argued in the previous section, this is a rather problematic issue in a situation when English is taught primarily as a language for international communication. Secondly, the type of topics suggested in the Council of Europe publication can probably run the risk of encouraging a rather reductionist view of other cultures.

Although there may be good reasons to focus on characteristics that distinguish members of one cultural community from another, there is always a possibility for oversimplification and misrepresentation in applying cultural traits unconditionally to a whole nation of people (Guest 2002). In fact, it can be claimed that aspects of everyday culture are impossible to teach, since they vary down to the level of each individual (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman 2004). How, then, can these problems be solved?

Several scholars have suggested that, rather than teaching culture as factual information, students ought to be helped to become cultural investigators. 'Practical' or 'applied ethnography' is the term used for an approach in which cultural manifestations, texts in particular, are the focus of attention, and students study and explore them in terms of the values and assumptions that they reveal and the many possible meanings that they can convey (Byram & Fleming 1998; Corbett 2003). Such an approach can allow students to discover and examine the 'dominant culture patterns' as well as opposing and conflicting views. In this way, students can be helped to see how cultures are diverse and many-faceted, and that manifestations of culture vary not only within each nation state, but even within each social group and from one context to another. Since the students, as foreigners, will have to examine the culture

from an outsider's perspective, this also provides an opportunity to focus on intercultural issues (Sercu 2002).

The strategy of using texts as the point of departure and exploring the many cultural meanings that may emerge from them can, of course, be applied to work with any number of different cultures. Thus, it can be said to provide an alternative to the tradition of focusing on one target culture in the teaching of a foreign language. This means that, in an ethnographic approach to work with cultural questions in foreign language education one cannot be said to have found an answer to the question of which topics and which countries to focus on. Rather, the approach indicates that it is more important *how* students work with the cultural material than *which* topics they deal with (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993). A main concern is to focus on the development of the students' insight and understanding and of their willingness to continue as cultural observers and interpreters in the future.

In order for this to happen, however, there is an obvious need to select texts and materials that actually do represent a specific cultural community (see section 3.1.2). Such texts could reveal the cultural patterns and understandings of one or more specific cultures, and they could also show the relationship and the borders between several cultures. It can be argued that texts that show cultural encounters, especially ones that indicate possible contacts between the students and members of other cultures, are particularly useful (Risager 1991; Sercu 2002).

In order to draw the students' attention to the opportunities and the challenges that situations of foreign language use may involve, texts that have a culture-general focus can also be useful (Damen 1987). Such texts could allow students to learn about the 'nature of culture', and provide them with information about a whole range of cultural differences, for example related to ideology, religion, traditions or everyday affairs. Another approach could be to work with central ideas and concepts in intercultural education such as tolerance, respect and empathy.

In order to develop the students' attitudes towards other cultures, it can be argued that it is necessary to let students meet the foreign culture by way of everyday situations and 'real' people that the students can relate to on a personal level. Risager's (1991) call for textbooks to include not only 'macro level texts' that provide factual

information, but also 'micro level texts' that present real people with 'feelings, attitudes, values and perceived problems' can be a useful reminder here (ibid: 183). If students get the opportunity to see how people in another culture live, how they behave in different situations, how they relate to each other and how they think and feel about the world around them, this may bring the foreign country closer to the students' own reality. Only if students meet such texts, argues Risager, will it be possible for them to experience the foreign country as real and as something that they can relate to.

It also seems necessary for students to be able to recognize the pictures that textbooks present of foreign countries as believable and realistic. This can probably be achieved if the textbooks present some of the diversity of the foreign country or culture, and if superficial, simplified or 'glossy' descriptions are avoided. On the basis of earlier research on textbooks there is reason to advice authors of future textbooks to include both positive and negative aspects of the foreign country. The textbook authors could also be encouraged to make themselves visible and to express their own attitudes, whether they are positive, negative or critical, towards the foreign culture (Risager 1991).

Another important consideration in the selection of topics is, of course, to try to make the material 'pupil appropriate' (Sercu 1998). One concern is to exploit the obvious motivation effect of letting students work with issues that they experience as interesting and relevant. Another - and even more important - concern has to do with the view that, in order for students to be able to learn at all and to develop new awareness and insight, they must be able to relate the new material and the new ideas to their previous experience and knowledge (Vygotsky 1978).[23]

3.3 Work with situational contexts

As indicated in the previous section, one attempt to come to grips with the different elements that constitute 'the cycle of text and context' is to break it up into separate elements and look at it from different perspectives. While section 3.2 looked at some aspects of work with the cultural context, then, this section has a main focus on the

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[23] This perspective will be followed up in sections 3.5.1 and 3.6.2.

situational context and some ways in which learners can be made aware of the role that context plays in situations of language use.

Work with context aims both to open the students' eyes to the many meanings that language (and context) may convey and to develop their ability to use the foreign language appropriately in different situations. However, given the vast number of possible situations in which a foreign language can be used, difficult choices need to be made, and the following sections discuss some of the issues that can be addressed when selecting content and approaches.

3.3.1 Different domains of language use

When trying to decide which contexts of language use students should be exposed to, the Council of Europe publication *Common European Framework* suggests that one can use the notion of different *domains* of language use as a starting point. This document describes four such domains, namely the personal domain, the public domain, the occupational domain and the educational domain. For each domain the document lists possible locations, institutions, persons, objects, events, operations and texts that can play a part in situations of language use. The idea is to provide an analytical framework in order to find out which arenas of language use a specific group of learners need to be prepared for (Council of Europe 2001: 44-51).

Since the teaching of English in Norwegian compulsory school aims to provide the learners with a foundation which will be useful in further work with the language in the future, it may seem difficult to single out some domains or aspects of domains that are particularly relevant. Each individual student may, clearly, need the language for very different purposes, in an infinite number of different arenas. At the same time, as argued in the previous section, it is important to link up with the students' own experience in the teaching and learning situation, and to provide them with examples of language use that they will be able to relate to. Thus, with reference to the *Common European Framework,* it could be argued that Norwegian teenagers' work with English should be centered, first and foremost, round contexts in the personal domain.[24]

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[24] The Council of Europe publication defines the personal domain as the domain 'in which the person concerned lives as a private individual, centred on home life with family and friends, and engages in

But it is also important to remember that many students may have interests and / or experiences related to the use of English that make aspects of other domains highly relevant, too. As Holliday (1994) points out, one of the basic challenges in foreign language education is to be aware of the needs and the characteristics of each group of students so that the classroom procedures can be modified accordingly. Although Holliday relates his argument to the ways in which language is taught, it is clear that it can also be applied to the selection of content in a foreign language course.

The teacher is, of course, the most crucial factor when it comes to adapting the content and the approaches of a course so that it is 'pupil appropriate' (Sercu 2002). But teaching materials also have an important role to play, and it could therefore be recommended that textbooks have a built-in flexibility that encourages reflection and choice in each individual teaching situation.[25]

3.3.2 Work with different discourse systems - conventions of language use

It was argued in section 2.4.5 that different discourse communities have their own 'envelopes of language', ie their own communicative style and their own norms and ideas as to how communication should happen. For learners of a foreign language, a main challenge lies therefore in being able to cope with other language communities' conventions of language use. What, then, are the characteristics of such discourse conventions, and how can students be encouraged to work with them?

As with most other aspects of foreign language teaching, one runs into a problem of selection. Which language community should one focus on? One option could be to concentrate on one specific community that is seen as particularly relevant. The insight that this work provides could, in turn, be used as a point of reference in encounters with other discourse communities. However, when English is taught as a language for international communication, it may seem just as natural to expose students to *many* different discourse conventions.

Yet another approach can be seen in work that aims to provide students with insight into discourse conventions as a general phenomenon. The intention, then,

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individual practices such as reading for pleasure, keeping a personal diary, pursuing a special interest or hobby, etc' (Council of Europe 2001: 45).
[25] This perspective will be followed up in section 10.1.

would not be to arrive at conclusions about specific cultures, but rather to help learners work out a 'checklist' of factors that may threaten intercultural situations, and thus enable them to find possible linguistic reasons for misunderstandings (Müller-Jacquier 2000).

Such work often refers to Hofstede's (1991) distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and to Hall's (1976) notion of low-context and high-context communication (Gudykunst 1998). In individualistic cultures, communication will most often be centered round the 'I' identity, while collectivist cultures focus on the 'we' identity. Low-context communication is typical in individualistic cultures and is characterized by a direct, explicit, open and precise style of speech. High-context communication, on the other hand, is indirect, ambiguous and understated, and much of the meaning of the message must be picked up from the context (Gudykunst 1998: 180).

For Norwegian students who, in most cases, have considerable experience of American English outside the classroom, these distinctions may be quite useful. Although one should always be careful not to generalize, students of English would clearly benefit from learning that the United States is seen as a predominantly individualistic culture and that many Americans favor a direct style of speech. Moreover, many Americans would be likely to associate indirectness with dishonesty or subservience. In other countries, however, in which English can be used as a lingua franca, the situation may be quite the opposite, and directness of speech could be considered very impolite. Tannen (1994) shows how in Japan, for example, people tend to rephrase negative responses so that they do not appear direct and, thus, impolite. Here, then, there could be good reason to interpret a hesitant 'yes' as a definite 'no'.

Many other perspectives could be taken as well. One could, for example, focus on the fact that different cultures (or discourse systems) have different preferences as to the choice of topic, ie what it is considered appropriate and suitable to talk about at all (Scollon & Scollon 2001). Issues related to gender, the use of humor and customary non-verbal behavior are just some of the many other areas that could be worked with,

which students would probably find both intriguing and useful (Corbett 2003; FitzGerald 2003).

It has been argued that the first and most important step to take in order to be able to communicate successfully is to become aware of one's own discourse conventions, especially those that may be unusual and cause misunderstandings in other discourse communities (Fife 2002). When investigating the ways in which Norwegian people address one another, one may discover that Norwegian language use has small variations in register (levels of formality). Thus, only minor differences can be seen in the language used by Norwegian teachers, students, business people and football players, and only small adaptations need to be made if one addresses one of these rather than the other (Fife 2002). This, it could be pointed out, is not the case in many other discourse communities.

Also, when investigating forms of discourse, one may discover the Norwegian (and Scandinavian) tendency to be rather quiet, or modest, as many Norwegians prefer to call it. In other cultures, however, such unwillingness to speak and to keep a conversation going might be understood as lack of interest and even be interpreted as bad manners (Allwood 1999). At the same time, it is important to remember that the main issue here is not to encourage students to 'shed' their Norwegian identities when they speak English, but rather to help them avoid 'unconscious sociolinguistic transfer' (Chick 1996: 346).

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned when it comes to different communication strategies has to do with politeness conventions. A main concern here is to help students avoid being unintentionally rude, and to enable them to make conscious choices as to how they want to be understood by their interlocutors (Grant & Starks 2001).

The Council of Europe publication *Threshold Level 1990* claims that the main thing to remember is to show respect for one's interlocutor. The publication then lists different realizations of politeness conventions that are 'widely used and understood in English-speaking countries' (van Ek & Trim 1991: 109). In order to avoid being dogmatic, for example, students are advised to qualify simple declarative sentences with phrases such as 'I think', 'I believe' and 'I expect'. For students of English, it is

probably well worth the effort to practice politeness phrases and to learn how 'softeners' can be used in order to show polite inclusiveness and tentativeness (FitzGerald 2003).

The Council of Europe publication from 2001, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages,* presents politeness conventions in a different way. Here, the intention is to provide an overview of the issues that need to be considered in any communication situation, in any language, and it is left up to each foreign language syllabus and each course to provide examples that illustrate these issues. Four main areas are listed:

1. *'positive' politeness,* e.g.:
- showing interest in a person's well being;
- sharing experiences and concerns, 'troubles talk';
- expressing admiration, affection, gratitude;
- offering gifts, promising future favours, hospitality;
2. *'negative' politeness*, e.g.:
- avoiding face-threatening behaviour (dogmatism, direct orders, etc.);
- expressing regret, apologizing for face-threatening behaviour (correction, contradiction, prohibitions, etc.);
- using hedges, etc. (e.g.'I think', tag questions, etc.);
3. *appropriate use of 'please', 'thank you', etc.*;
4. *impoliteness* (deliberate flouting of politeness conventions), e.g.:
- bluntness, frankness;
- expressing contempt, dislike;
- strong complaint and reprimand;
- venting anger, impatience;
- asserting superiority (Council of Europe 2001: 119-120).

The *Common European Framework* also points to the fact that students should be aware of linguistic markers of social relations and differences in register. While the underlying assumption in the Council of Europe publication is that learners will prepare themselves for language use in a specific target culture, it seems that this framework could also be adopted as a useful tool when analyzing texts and conventions related to a variety of language communities.

3.3.3 Work with situational contexts

Some characteristics of different language communities' conventions of language use can, clearly, be taught. However, since contexts are complex and always changing, an

equally fruitful strategy might be to encourage students to investigate texts and, with the approach of an ethnographer, explore the ways in which language is used in a given situation (Corbett 2003; Vellenga 2004). Such an approach could draw the students' attention to different aspects of context and the influence that they may have on the meanings that are negotiated. The attitude of the ethnographer can, of course, be useful also in situations of language use, when trying to interpret the situation and to adjust one's language accordingly.

Hymes' (1974) description of the different elements that constitute a situational context is often referred to as a useful tool when investigating texts. Hymes orders his description under the acronym SPEAKING:

- Situation (the setting: time and place)
- Participants (the possible combinations of speakers and listeners)
- Ends (the goals and outcomes of the speech event)
- Act sequence (the form and the content)
- Key (the tone, manner, or spirit in which something is conveyed)
- Instrumentalities (the choice of channel (for example oral, written or telegraphic language) and form (eg different regional and social varieties of a language))
- Norms of interaction and interpretation
- Genre (refers to categories such as poem, curse, prayer, lecture, commercial etc).

Explicit focus on and active investigation of different aspects of context will, obviously, contribute to increased awareness of the role that contextual factors play in a communication situation. But classroom work with context could also be brought one step further. With reference to Hymes' description, Kramsch (1993) suggests a technique that she calls 'expanding the context', which involves varying the different parameters of a context. When one or more of the contextual elements change, students will be able to see how language changes accordingly. In this way, students will also be made aware of the ways in which contexts are not stable, but rather constantly changed and recreated by the participants.

If one focuses on the needs of intermediate learners of a foreign language, it can be argued that a simpler theoretical framework than Hymes' may suffice as the basis for students' investigation of text and context. Much insight and learning will, probably, result if students were asked simply to consider the following question in

their work with a text: 'Why is something being done with language in this way, who is doing it and to what effect? (McRae 1996: 26)

The ways in which contexts are created and interpreted can be said to follow the rules of a 'grammar of context' (Scollon & Scollon 2001). The term 'grammar' is used to indicate that, just as we know the grammatical rules of a language (consciously or unconsciously), we also know the rules by which contexts are constructed. It is this knowledge that we use when we are able to interpret the meanings of other speakers in our own language in our own discourse community, and it is the lack of such knowledge that may cause difficulties when we try to exchange and interpret meaning in contexts that we are less familiar with.

A central point when working with the contexts of a foreign language, then, is the fact that there is no one-to-one relationship between the grammar of context in the students' native language and that of the foreign language. The customary ways in which speakers address one another in a given situation in their own language may differ considerably from the ways that would be appropriate in a different language community, and students would, obviously, benefit from being made aware of the potential problems that the application of one's own grammar of context may lead to in situations of foreign language use (Scollon & Scollon 2001; Vellenga 2004).

It is, however, important to remember that the students' prior knowledge of contexts can be a useful resource to draw on (Fenner & Newby 2000). When asked to investigate their own native language use, learners will recognize the ways in which language changes from one situation to another, depending on the roles of the participants, the level of formality and so on. This insight can, then, be used as a starting point when exploring and working with contexts in the foreign language and also as a point of reference when addressing problems that possible interference from one's native language background may cause (Nelson 1995).

In fact, it seems obvious that much learning can result from repeated comparison between aspects of the foreign situational context and corresponding ones in the students' own language communities. One could focus on the way a specific situation, a speech event or even a speech act manifests itself in the foreign language, and ask students to consider the ways that they would express the same things in their

own language. Such a strategy could, clearly, contribute to heightening the students' awareness both of the 'grammar of context' that they already know and of the need to be attentive to the rules that govern other contexts (Saville-Troike 1996).

When choosing texts for investigation, it seems important to include texts that show both the transactional and the interactional function of language. The 'transactional function' of language refers to the exchange or the presentation of information, while the interactional function refers to the ways in which language is used to establish and maintain social relationships. Traditionally, foreign language education has focused only on the transactional function and the referential meaning of language (Saville-Troike 1996). In order for students to develop their pragmatic competence, however, they need to work with texts that provide examples of the interactional function of language. One obvious focus in the students' investigation of texts, then, could be on the ways in which social meaning is conveyed in a situation of interaction and on the pragmatic rules that seem to govern the ways in which interlocutors exchange meaning (Corbett 2003; Vellenga 2004).

3.3.4 The students' own contexts

When students meet texts and tasks, when they interact with each other and when they produce their own texts, they do so within the context of the classroom and the teaching and learning situation (Widdowson 1990). Consequently, it seems natural to exploit the potential that these situations provide when it comes to demonstrating and exploring the interplay between language and context. The cultural diversity that can be found in many classrooms can be used as a resource here. The most important aspect of such work, however, is the fact that the students themselves are active participants in the contexts that are created in the classroom situation.

In work with context and the role that it plays in communication situations, it may also be important to be aware of the ways in which we all bring our own frames of reference into the act of decoding texts and contexts. Surely, our own language and culture have provided us with a set of understandings and ways of categorizing the world. But we are all products of more than our community, and we are formed by a whole range of circumstances that work on the individual level. As members of different social settings, then, previous experience allows us to choose from a

90

repertoire of perspectives and to draw on a variety of different contexts in the construction of meaning. All this can be said to constitute parts of our 'individual contexts', which we bring to the situation of language use (Samovar, Porter & Stefani 1998).

The way in which meaning is individually constructed can perhaps be illustrated most clearly by our reactions to what we read. When Barthes (1975: 151) said that 'in the text, only the reader speaks', he was perhaps pushing the point a bit far. There has, however, been an increasing understanding and acceptance of the fact that reading is a participatory activity. Widdowson (1995) illustrates this with reference to readers' reactions to *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing. Based on letters she has received, Lessing reports that some readers tend to see the book as dealing exclusively with the struggle between men and women. Others read it as a leftist political novel, while yet others see only the theme of mental illness in the book. This phenomenon is, according to Widdowson, a result of the way in which readers bring different things to the text from their own world and 'read their own reality into it' (1995: 168).

This will happen to any text; listeners and readers will interpret a text on the basis of their previous experience of the world (and the language) and, to put it simply, will 'hear what they expect to hear' (Aitchison 1989: 205). Meaning, then, is not only dependent on what is 'in' the text, but on the dialogue between the reader (listener) and the text (Kramsch 1993). Thus, although members of the same discourse community share a lot of background knowledge and may feel that they 'understand each other', this may be an illusion. According to Widdowson (1990: 108), 'it is unlikely that we ever achieve an exact match between intention and interpretation, and we would probably not know it if we did.'

It can be argued that this perspective is quite a useful one in foreign language education. The language learner who realizes that language is ambiguous and that meaning is always individually constructed may be able to develop an awareness of the fact that one's own understandings are not the only ones possible, that meaning is always negotiable and that successful communication is certainly linked to the parties' willingness to consider other interpretations and to take the other person's perspective.

At the same time, since one can never be certain what the other person means, it may be a useful strategy to recognize one's own limitations and to 'expect things to go wrong' (Scollon & Scollon 2001: 22). Thus, it can be argued that, in situations of intercultural communication, mutual understanding and agreement may not be a realistic or even a desirable goal. Rather, solutions can be found in acceptance of the difficulty of the task, and it can be seen as 'a large step to learn to accept that you do not understand each other' (Fennes & Hapgood 1997: 37).

Another possible effect of focusing on the students' individual contexts could be that, if learners recognize meaning as an individually constructed phenomenon, they may feel a greater personal involvement and responsibility for the work with texts and contexts that goes on in foreign language education. If students are encouraged to reflect on their own 'individual context' and the role that it plays in encounters with texts and contexts in the foreign language, they may experience that their studies become more meaningful and more relevant for them.

3.4 Work with intercultural issues

As indicated earlier, the objectives related to – and the possible effects of – work with questions of context and culture in foreign language education are closely related. Therefore, the ways of exploring contexts and working with cultural topics suggested in the previous sections may, certainly, contribute towards the development of the students' intercultural awareness. This section, then, does not purport to provide an extensive survey of possible approaches to work with intercultural questions. Rather, it explores in some more detail what intercultural learning is all about and discusses some of the issues that need to be addressed when trying to encourage intercultural learning in the classroom.

3.4.1 Intercultural learning – what is it?

It was established in section 2.4.5 that the increased use of the term 'intercultural' rather than 'cultural' in foreign language education seems to indicate an awareness of the encounter between cultures that takes place when someone tries to learn another language. The term may also indicate a movement away from the exclusive focus on one target culture and open for a broader perspective when it comes to dealing with

cultural questions in foreign language education. Last, but not least, it was mentioned how the term 'intercultural' links up with the field of intercultural communication and thus points to objectives beyond those traditionally associated with foreign language learning.

Work with intercultural issues often aims to develop 'intercultural competence', which can be summed up as having the ability 'to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures' (Meyer 1991: 137). The term intercultural competence may be a natural one to use when it is described, the way Byram (1997) does, in terms of separate objectives that are supposed to form the basis for assessment (see section 2.4.5). However, central areas in intercultural education such as the development of respect and the ability to empathize are certainly difficult to assess (Simensen 2001). Therefore, 'intercultural awareness' and 'intercultural understanding' may be more appropriate terms to use in a foreign language course. In fact, 'intercultural learning' can be seen as an even more adequate term, as it indicates that work with contexts and cultures is a never-ending process, and that the main objective is related to persistent commitments and attitudes rather than to any desired end product (Fennes & Hapgood 1997).

What, then, does intercultural learning involve? Most writing about intercultural competence and intercultural learning in foreign language education describes it in terms of three different dimensions, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes (Risager 1994; Byram & Zarate 1997; Chamberlain 2000). When it comes to the knowledge dimension of intercultural learning, many of the content areas suggested in section 3.2.2 could, clearly, be useful. Descriptions and discussions of the challenges that intercultural communication may entail and texts that focus on intercultural issues in general may be particularly relevant (Damen 1987).

Intercultural skills are often defined in terms of the ability to adapt to new cultural contexts. Both verbal and non-verbal skills may come into play here and Fennes & Hapgood, for example, talk about the need for students to learn both 'how to greet and how to eat' (1997: 47). However, as indicated in earlier sections, there is certainly reason to question the tradition of expecting learners to simply accept and

'learn' existing power structures (Guilherme 2002). Rather than linking work with intercultural skills to any given norm, then, such skills could be defined in terms of the ability to discover and interpret cultural expressions, and to act in a respectful and cooperative way in situations where members of different cultures meet (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey 2002; Sercu 2002).

Thus, while it is obviously important to inform students about customary behavior in other discourse communities, it is also necessary to point out the many possible discourses that are available to them, and to encourage students to reflect on the roles and positions that they themselves may want to adopt as users of the foreign language (Chick 1996; Corbett 2003).

When it comes to attitudes, intercultural learning has to do with the development of appreciation of other cultures, openness towards 'otherness' and willingness to take the other's perspective (Fennes & Hapgood 1997). As indicated in section 2.4.5, these attitudes are particularly relevant for users of a foreign language, but they are also important in other situations of interdiscourse communication (Scollon & Scollon 2001). One can therefore talk about the need to be 'mindful' in any communication situation, ie to try to create new categories in one's understanding of the world, to be open to new information and to be aware of more than one perspective (Gudykunst 1998: 31). Tannen (1990: 296) argues that 'We would all do well to distrust our automatic responses to what others say, especially if our automatic responses are negative. Instead, we should try to see things from the other person's perspective'. Tannen refers to her studies of women's and men's communication strategies, but her reminder certainly has equal relevance for situations of foreign language use.

It is here that the notions of intercultural competence and intercultural learning, in particular, indicate objectives beyond those related to the communication situation. While the ideal of 'the intercultural speaker' designates someone who is able to communicate successfully across cultural boundaries, it also implies that he or she is both willing and able to initiate, maintain and work to improve intercultural relationships. Ideas of cultural understanding, respect and tolerance are given positive connotations, interaction between different cultures is seen to be desirable, and cultural

diversity is seen to enable development and growth (Byram & Zarate 1997; Fantini 1997).

This understanding seems to be communicated whenever the term 'intercultural' is used with reference to foreign language education. However, this positive view of cultural diversity and multiplicity is, in itself, the product of a specific cultural context. Thus, in work with intercultural questions it seems necessary to remember that this understanding stems from an urban, industrialized, intellectual tradition and that other traditions will reject cultural plurality as something desirable. In many places in the world, questions of identity will, above all, be linked to stable and consensual categories of one national or religious culture (Kramsch 1998).

With the considerable attention in Europe and the United States to intercultural education, there is also reason to be aware that the field is being developed around Western ideals and based on Western understandings of the world. Parmenter (2003) points to the fact that central concepts such as identity, communication and education are often understood quite differently in Asia and in the Western world. Therefore, she argues, if the field of intercultural education is developed on the basis of a Euro-American understanding of these concepts, it may not make much sense – and it might even be rejected – in an Asian setting. This does not mean, however, that the *ideals* of intercultural education will not be embraced by Asians. On the contrary, says Parmenter, Asians are in fact used to relating to differing - and sometimes contradictory - views of the world in their everyday lives. As in all work with cultural questions, then, it seems important to exert self-criticism and reflect on the degree to which this aspect of foreign language education also follows in Robinson Crusoe's footsteps.

3.4.2 The presentation of 'the other'

Situations of intercultural interaction are often experienced as encounters between 'us' and 'them'. In order to prepare students for such encounters, then, there seems to be an obvious need to provide students with pictures of 'the other'. But encounters with 'the other' may feel threatening, as they challenge the beliefs, values and patterns of behaviour that one is used to – and prefers (Paige & Martin 1996). Therefore, careful attention needs to be paid as to how these pictures are presented.

It has been argued that fear of the foreign can result in two different reactions, namely xenophobia and exotism (Fennes & Hapgood 1997). Xenophobia is known as an aversion to persons who represent the foreign culture, and the development of a relationship that functions as a defense against the perceived threat. Exotism, on the other hand, is a specific form of xenophilia (love and adoration of the foreign). Exotism is the glorification of foreign cultures that are so far away that they do not represent a threat to one's immediate environment. Fear of social change in local situations may, in particular, lead to this escape into idealism. According to Fennes & Hapgood, exotism can be seen for instance in the glorification in Europe of Native Americans as well as other indigenous groups on remote continents.

Another type of exotism is the consumer-type relationship to 'the other' that can be seen for example in the increased tourism to 'exotic' places (McLaren 1995). We should beware of 'a mere celebration of difference', McLaren says, and we should try to counteract the tendency of the arrogant Western tourist to want to 'see it all', yet never to question his or her own superiority. He argues that 'the other' must neither be exotized nor demonized, but differences should be discussed in order to provide positions from which social relations and cultural practices can be examined critically.

For, in order to be able to meet 'the other' with openness and respect, there is also a need to consider one's own role and one's own expectations in a cultural encounter. For Norwegians, there is obvious reason to beware of the tendency in the West, pointed out by Said (1978), to describe and to define other cultures by way of a Western perspective and to even impose this picture on 'the other'. Since the increasing use of English as a lingua franca, in itself, has been criticized for having imperialistic overtones, insight into this tendency – and the will to counteract it - seems particularly relevant when English is used in encounters between people from Western and non-Western cultures.

Intercultural education often takes place by way of case studies, or 'critical incidents' that draw the learners' attention to a misunderstanding, problem or conflict that arises in a situation of cross-cultural contact. Students can then examine and reflect on the nature of the problem, discover cultural differences and, possibly, draw

conclusions. Although such an approach has obvious advantages, it may also represent a danger of producing stereotypes and overgeneralizations (Fowler & Blohm 2004).

Contrastive analysis is another commonly used approach. Here, cultures are often described in terms of declarative propositions, and taxonomies of differences between two cultures are worked out. The result is often a rather simplified view of both cultures, and the approach seems to produce a binarity between 'us' and 'them'. Consequently, contrastive analysis has also been criticized for misrepresenting cultures by way of convenient 'essences' of culture (Guest 2002).

As indicated in section 2.2.2, stereotypes, or overgeneralizations, are most often referred to as something that should be avoided. At the same time, it must be admitted that it is very difficult to steer clear of them, as simplifications seem to be a natural part of our meaning making processes. In fact, it can even be argued that stereotypes can have a positive effect on our attempts to understand other cultures, as there is always an element of truth and accurate cultural observation in them (Scollon & Scollon 2001). In order for stereotypes not to develop into prejudiced views, however, we need to acknowledge them for what they are. According to Adler (1997), stereotypes can be constructive if

- they are consciously held. People must know that they describe group norms and not individual characteristics
- they are descriptive rather than evaluative
- they are accurate, and they are based on data and observation
- they are a first, best guess about a group
- they are open to modification when new data is received.

It can be concluded, then, that there seems to be a need for a 'golden mean' in intercultural education between working with stereotypes and showing complexity (Scollon & Scollon 2001). The diversity of all cultures can be emphasized, and students can also be reminded not to take cultural information at face value. Rather, they can be encouraged to examine texts and materials critically, to try to see an issue from several different perspectives and to always reconsider their own assumptions (Guest 2002; McKay 2002; Eikeland 2004).

It seems that the most important task in intercultural learning is to establish a 'sphere of interculturality' in which students can reflect on their own culture in

relation to others (McKay 2002). The objective may not necessarily be to understand, but rather to encounter other cultures' grounds of meaning, to identify and explore the boundary between different cultures and to explore oneself in the process (Kramsch 1993).

Bhabha's (1994) notion of the third space seems to be a fruitful description of this arena in the intersection between multiple native and target cultures, where learners can position themselves in the constant search for new identities and new meanings (see section 2.1.2). The concept of cultural awareness and understanding can perhaps best be linked to the students' willingness to enter this arena, and to consider the multiple perspectives that can be taken in a situation of intercultural communication.

3.4.3 'The other' in terms of language and language use

The language itself, of course, represents a great source of information when it comes to trying to get to grips with other cultures' 'ground of meaning' (Nostrand 1974: 279). This does not only apply to different discourse communities' contextual references and conventions of language use, but also to the meaning of separate words. Words are central cultural artifacts, and through the study of central words in a culture, one can learn much about the particular culture's core values.

Wierzbicka (1997) has shown how a word like 'freedom', for example, has different meanings and connotations in English than the literal translations into other languages do. The Russian word *svoboda* and the Polish word *wolnosc* embody quite different concepts, she says, while other languages do not have any one word that the concept of 'freedom' could be translated into at all (ibid: 152). Thus, in order to work with and try to understand a foreign culture, one could try to find the words and concepts that seem to be most central in a particular culture and focus on an investigation of these 'key words' and the meanings that they seem to carry. In the study of Australia, for example, Wierzbicka argues that such work could be centered round words like 'mate' and 'Aussie'.

Wierzbicka's argument applies to the different meanings of words in different languages, but the connotations of a word like the English 'freedom' could probably be said to vary from one English-speaking community to another as well (Brøgger

1992). The very fact that English is used in many different ways in a variety of different communities could therefore be a useful point of reference when trying to prepare the students for the linguistic and cultural diversity that they will encounter as users of English. Thus, in the students' work with different cultures and discourse communities, differences in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and idioms could be given a central place, along with an investigation of the meanings that these differences may convey.

3.5 Which texts to choose?

Previous sections have pointed to texts as the most central source of information for foreign language students in their work with questions of context and culture, and some of the issues that need to be addressed when choosing texts for a foreign language textbook have been discussed. However, in addition to the questions dealt with so far, the choice of texts also involves considerations related to readability and text type or genre (Nation 2000). Since the 1997 English syllabus emphasizes the use of fictional and other 'authentic' texts, this section links up with the discussion of the role that such texts can play in foreign language education. Since illustrations play a central role in a textbook's presentation of foreign countries and cultures, the section also looks into some of the issues that can be considered when selecting pictures and photographs for a foreign language textbook.

3.5.1 The question of authenticity

In order to provide students with clear and instructive examples of language that suit their level of proficiency, texts have often been written specifically for the foreign language textbook. It is obvious that the language presented in such texts may seen contrived, and not always resemble the type of 'real' or 'authentic' language that is used in real life situations (Tomlinson 2001: 68).

The problem applies, in particular, to renderings of spoken language. One reason for this lies in the fact that participants in normal communication situations tend to use just fragments of sentences. Conversation partners, most often, refer to the context that they are in, and the bits of language that they produce therefore make perfect sense to them. In other words, since so much of the meaning of language lies in

the context, spoken language in real life situations is used merely to complement that context. In a textbook, however, it is difficult to establish such shared knowledge of context. Consequently, the spoken language that is presented in a textbook text is often redundant and duplicates context in a way that is never done in real life (Widdowson 1998a).

As a reaction to this problem, some textbook authors have omitted dialogues from their books altogether (see section 6.2.6). Others have made an effort to provide textbook dialogues with some features of spontaneous speech, such as hesitation, incomplete sentences and fillers (Fenner & Newby 2000). Yet others have turned to the notion of 'authentic texts' to solve the problem.

With the new focus in the 1980s on the development of the students' communication skills there was a growing concern that students needed to be exposed to examples of 'authentic' language. The term 'authentic text' came to be used about texts that serve a purpose in the world outside the textbook and the classroom, ie texts that have not been written for a pedagogic purpose. Simensen (1998) provides the following examples of authentic texts that can be brought into the foreign language classroom:

- novels, short stories, plays, poems, limericks,
- biographies,
- travel books,
- handbooks, pamphlets,
- instructions, directions,
- comics,
- time-tables, maps, diagrams,
- dictionaries, telephone directories,
- articles in newspapers, journals *etc*. (1998: 155)

It is clear that such texts may represent interesting encounters with the foreign culture and provide valid examples of language as it is used in a particular discourse community. Fictional texts, in particular, have been seen to have great potential when it comes to showing instances of real communication in real social contexts (McCarthy & Carter 1994).

The notion of authenticity, however, has been much debated. 'Real' or 'authentic' language, it has been argued, is that which functions in a given context.

When an 'authentic text' (as it is described above) is removed from the context in which it usually appears and is brought into a new context (ie a textbook or a classroom), it must therefore be said to have lost its authenticity (Ibsen & Wiland 2000). Consequently, it is a breach of logic to think that the use of 'authentic texts', in itself, can guarantee that students will learn 'real' language (Widdowson 1998a).

The students' situational context is that of the foreign language classroom and the most 'real' language for them is, of course, that which they use themselves. In order to develop the students' practical language skills, the main task for foreign language education must therefore be to encourage 'authentic' language use in the language learning situation (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996; Widdowson 1998a). When it comes to textbook texts, it seems that students, first and foremost, need help to 'reconnect' the texts with the context that they are in, so that they can experience them as relevant and topical starting points for their own, active language use (Widdowson 1990).

In order for this to happen, it seems necessary to take the learners' own background, interests and concerns into consideration. Thus, the texts must be relatively easily accessible, they must deal with a content that the students find interesting, and the content must be presented in a way that inspires the students' imagination and encourages independent and creative language use (Sercu 2002). Since foreign language learning is a complex undertaking and since learners will have different needs and abilities, it would certainly be useful if texts could open for work with a variety of linguistic as well as non-linguistic issues, at a variety of levels (Fenner & Newby 2000).

Schema theory has shown that learning can happen only if the new concepts or the new material link up with that which the learners already know something about. If texts build on the schematic knowledge that the learners already have, it will be easier for them to grasp the content. But learners also have systemic knowledge (linguistic knowledge), which needs to be considered when presenting a text to them. Thus, it seems to be a good rule of thumb to try to balance the challenges placed on the learners' schematic knowledge with the challenges placed on their systemic knowledge (Widdowson 1990). In other words, texts that aim to present new language

and extend the students' systemic knowledge could deal with a content that the students are relatively familiar with, while texts that aim to expand their schematic knowledge could be presented in language that the students already master.

3.5.2 Fictional texts

Historically, work with fictional texts has, most often, been linked to the teaching of 'high' culture. The objective has been to provide students with 'cultural capital' in the form of knowledge about literary canon and famous authors, in the German 'Bildung' tradition. But the selection of texts has also often aimed to contribute to the students' moral edification and aesthetic experiences (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000).

However, this approach has been criticized for several reasons. First of all, in order for students to be able to relate to, understand and appreciate high quality texts, they will obviously need quite a bit of guidance in their work with them. But foreign language education has tended to neglect this, and students have, most often, been expected simply to accept the teacher's or the textbooks' understanding of the texts. Thus, foreign language education can be said to have a tradition of limiting the many opportunities that fictional texts open for the students' own learning (Carter 1996).

Another problem is related to the fact that, in order to make canonical texts accessible to the students, textbooks sometimes present only simplified abridgements of them. The result does not always do justice to the original texts. Consequently, the opportunities for the students' insight into and appreciation of the texts' literary qualities may be considerably reduced (Ibsen & Wiland 2000).

The problem of adapting fictional texts so that they may suit the learners applies also, of course, to the content that the texts deal with. It is not always easy to present texts from earlier times in such a way that teenage students find them relevant and motivating. One consequence of this can be seen in the argument that, for teenage learners, the best idea is to use fictional texts that have been written specially for this age group (Rönnqvist & Sell 1994).

However, provided that one is able to find fictional texts that suit the learners both in terms of the level of language and the content that they deal with, many good reasons can be given for including such texts in a foreign language course. The most important argument lies, clearly, in the fact that fictional texts open for the exploration

of meaning in different ways than non-fictional texts do (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000). While simple, straightforward texts are useful points of reference when students work with the basic meanings and the structures of the foreign language, more complex texts are needed in order for students to be able to investigate the many aspects of language and context that real language use involves.

In fictional texts, students can be exposed to unique and creative uses of language which reflect ordinary conversation, but which – from a language teaching perspective - occur in a more manageable format. Since they describe the setting in which language is used, fictional texts can also be seen as very useful vehicles for the exploration of the relationships between language, context and culture (McCarthy & Carter 1994). In order to help students develop the ability to cope with the richness and variation of real language use, then, fictional texts have much to offer (McRae 1996).

Work with well-known authors and texts can, of course, be one element in providing students with insight into another culture's 'collective cultural identity' (Brøgger 1992; see section 3.2.2). It can also be argued that literary texts represent useful sources of information about cultural conditions in a foreign country, and that they provide students with knowledge about and personal experiences with other people. A particularly valuable trait of fictional texts is that they present the foreign culture by way of a 'personal voice' and therefore offer themselves to the readers as 'cultural meeting points' (Fenner 2001).

Fictional texts are also useful in the way that, since they are undetermined and open, with 'gaps' that the readers have to fill in, they seem to encourage involvement and independent reflection more than non-fictional texts do (Fenner 2001). The students' own imaginative interaction with texts is, clearly, a necessary prerequisite for their ability to use the language actively and creatively. Poetry and other imaginative uses of the language can be said to have an important role to play as well, both in indicating some of the many creative things that people do with language and in opening for the students' own reflection and meaning making (Carter 1996).

3.5.3 Illustrations

Pictures and illustrations that are used in a foreign language course can also be interpreted as 'texts'. Some of them may provide informative glimpses of everyday

situations and everyday life in a foreign country, while others may provide information about central cultural phenomena or cultural artifacts. Some illustrations may, literally, aim to add color to a text and motivate students for further reading, while others may be included simply in order to fill a page or to provide a rest for the eye.

When selecting illustrations in a foreign language textbook, Kress & Leeuwen's (1996) 'grammar of visual design' can be a useful point of reference. They describe the effects that different illustrations may have, with a main focus on the contact that is established between the illustration ('the image') and the viewer. If the people portrayed in an image are shown close-up and are gazing directly at the viewer, they can be said to *demand* contact with the viewer. If, on the other hand, people and landscapes are portrayed at a great distance, the image communicates that the scene presented is there for 'contemplation only, out of reach', and that the people portrayed are remote and rather irrelevant to the viewer's situation (ibid: 134).

Thus, it certainly seems that illustrations can have a role to play in indicating to the learners how 'far away' the foreign culture is. If a textbook contains illustrations that show scenes at close distance and people who are demanding contact with the viewer, this may contribute to bringing the foreign culture closer to the students. On the other hand, if this is not the case, readers may get the impression that the foreign culture is there only to be observed and contemplated from a distance.

3.6 The students' positions

So far, my discussion has primarily dealt with the content and the approaches that can make different types of work with questions of context and culture possible in a foreign language course. This section shifts the focus over to the students and explores some issues that may have consequences for the students' roles in the foreign language learning situation as well as for their positions as users of the foreign language.

3.6.1 School authority and learner autonomy; possibilities for students' choice

In the realm of a country's compulsory education, the school system, the curriculum and the teacher have both the obligation and the authority to define the goals and the contents of the teaching of a foreign language. The teaching materials that are used

provide further frames within which work with the foreign language is to take place. It is these agents' obvious prerogative and also their responsibility to impose both texts and contexts on the learner and, to some extent, to define the learners' possible roles as users of the foreign language as well.

Many good reasons can be given for exposing students to particular areas of study or training them to master particular discourses. But there are also good reasons why students should be given the opportunity to define their *own* needs and to carve out their own identity as users of the foreign language (Widdowson 1990; Kramsch 1993). This does not mean, of course, that the students themselves will be able to determine the contents and the progression of the course. Rather, what is needed is a balance of learner autonomy and educational authority (Widdowson 1990; Sercu 2002).

As indicated in section 3.5.1, learning can only take place if the new material links up with that which students already know. Only the learner has insight into his or her own pre-knowledge and only the learner him- or herself has the ability to establish the necessary relationship between the new and the old material. Therefore, it would obviously facilitate learning if students were allowed to take an active part when materials and approaches are chosen. If this were the case, each person's learning situation could be adapted specifically to his or her particular level of proficiency, needs and interests.

If students are to be able to make relevant and constructive choices, however, they have to be trained to do so, and the choices that are available have to be made visible for them. According to Fenner & Newby (2000), teaching materials can be designed in such a way that they allow and encourage students to select among a number of options in a number of different situations. They provide this list of areas within which students should be able to choose:

- choice of subject matter
- choice of different types of texts
- choice of different levels
- choice of varying amounts (of texts and tasks)
- choice of approach to text
- choice of tasks
- choice of approach to tasks

- choice of progression (ibid: 80).

This view of teaching materials seems to correspond to two of the possible roles that textbooks can have, namely those of a resource and a map (see section 2.3.2).

The question of learner autonomy can be linked to the establishment of a positive and productive learning environment in the classroom, but it can also be linked to the need for students to define their own roles as users of the foreign language. When a foreign language course asks students to enter a particular discourse, it will, inevitably, ask them to accept a 'regime of truth' (Pennycook 1994: 132). But students who are aware of the many possibilities that foreign language education can provide will be better able to reflect on the relevance that the discourses and the contents presented may have for them. With an active and critical attitude to the many possible roles and positions that foreign language use may entail, students may thus be better able to define and develop their own voice as users of the foreign language.

The question of learner autonomy also has to do with the students' future needs and their ability to develop as users of the foreign language in situations outside the classroom. For, although many students will appreciate and prefer the framework that the educational situation provides in their daily work with the language, it is important that they do not get the impression that the teacher, the textbook and the classroom are necessary prerequisites in order for learning to take place. Therefore, in order to prepare students for life-long learning and development, it would seem natural for foreign language education to help students develop the capacity for independent learning (Holec 1981; Ellis & Sinclair 1989; Sercu 2002).

3.6.2 Different types of exercises

Foreign language education has been criticized for providing students with only limited opportunities for work with the new language. First of all, the main focus has, traditionally, been on language practice rather than language use, thus confining the students' experience with the language to the classroom and its 'world of exercises' (Säljö 2000). Even after the advent of the communicative approach, the understanding that language needs to be learned before it can be used seems to have been difficult to remove from many classrooms (Tornberg 2000).

When it comes to the non-linguistic content of a foreign language course, students have, most often, been asked simply to recapitulate and reproduce the information that is given (Sercu 2002). Most questions have been 'closed' in the way that they have one and only one correct answer, and a common strategy has been to ask questions whose answers can be 'lifted' directly from the text. In Norwegian textbooks for the teaching and learning of a foreign language, where comprehension questions have had a central position, this seems certainly to have been the case. It has been argued that these questions have prompted only mechanical and relatively useless recapitulation of the texts and that their main function has been to check that the students have done their homework (Ibsen & Wiland 2000; Fenner 2001).

In the 1970s and 80s, new perspectives on learning and how it can happen became influential (Dysthe 2001). Theorists like Vygotsky (eg 1978) and Bakhtin (eg 1981) pointed to the role that language plays in any learning situation and to the fact that learning must be linked to social, interactive processes. Moreover, socio-cultural theories of learning underline the fact that information cannot simply be 'passed on' and 'received' in order for students to acquire new knowledge. Rather, it is argued, the new material must be linked up with that which the learner is already familiar with. This can only happen if the learner him- or herself is the active part in a dialogic process with the material that is to be learned as well as with other people and elements in the learning situation (Dysthe 1995).

For foreign language education, such a view of learning has fundamental implications. First of all, students need to be provided with texts and topics that make it possible for them to link up the new material with situations and topics that they already know something about. Secondly, questions and exercises must encourage the learners to develop and formulate their own understandings of the material, in situations of dialogue and social interaction. This means that, although controlled and 'closed' language practice activities may be important in helping students master the formal aspects of the foreign language, students also need to be given exercises that open for more independent, varied and creative work.

Questions and exercises must be included that trigger the students' active involvement by signaling that there is no one 'correct' answer, but rather a variety of

equally valid answers that depend on the students' previous understanding and on their own active work in order to formulate them (Fenner & Newby 2001). McRae (1996) seems to make an important point when he argues for the need to activate the 'indispensable, but often ignored or taken for granted fifth skill: thinking' in work with a foreign language (ibid: 23).

Problem-solving tasks have been suggested as particularly fruitful in foreign language education and it seems obvious that, provided that they are related to an issue that the students find interesting and worthwhile, students will develop their mastery of the language in the process of working out the problem (Prabhu 1987; Widdowson 1990). However, many problem-solving tasks may be useful, first and foremost, in the way that they lead to valuable language practice. A task that has only one, clearly defined outcome cannot be said to encourage the type of dialogic process that seems to be crucial for the development of new knowledge and insight.

In order for students to be able to relate the content of a textbook text to their own experience and background, one approach could be to ask 'experience questions' (Cooper 1986). Another approach could be to appeal to the students' intellectual curiosity or 'text curiosity' and encourage them to explore different aspects of texts as well as their own relationship to the texts (McRae 1996: 27). The ethnographic investigation of texts described in sections 3.2.2 and 3.3.3 could be a case in point here.

It can also be argued that the issue of the students' independent reflection on a text can be taken one step further. The textbook and the teaching materials can, in themselves, be subject to critical reflection, thus increasing the students' awareness of how useful and relevant the texts they are given to work with are. Students could, for example, be encouraged to consider how a particular topic is described and also why it is presented to them at all. Kress (1989) recommends that the following critical questions should be asked about any textbook text:

- Why is this topic being written about?
- How is this topic being written about?
- What other ways of writing about the topic are there? (ibid: 7)

In drawing the students' attention to the different perspectives that can be taken in a text and to the possible biases that may be seen in the way an issue is presented, these questions also indicate a possible approach to work with intercultural questions.

Since the focus on intercultural issues in foreign language education is a relatively recent phenomenon, few approaches have had a chance to 'settle'. This situation can be said to open for new opportunities, and Fennes & Hapgood (1997) argue that the field of intercultural communication studies offers itself as a natural source of inspiration and a resource of possible activities and approaches. Among the most common techniques that have been developed here are simulations and role plays, which ask students to act out situations of cultural encounters and challenges (Landis, Bennett & Bennet 2004). Such activities could, clearly, be utilized for purposes of language practice as well as for intercultural learning in the foreign language classroom (Fantini 1997).

3.6.3 Different text types

The ways in which students are encouraged to relate and respond to the textbook materials depend, of course, on the types of activities and exercises they are given. But, in addressing a 'model reader', the texts themselves also contribute to defining the positions that students are offered in the language learning situation (Eco 1984; Berge 2003).

Selander (1995) distinguishes between three types of textbook texts, the *ostensive* text, the *narrative* text and the *discursive* text. These three text types seem to open for different types of student response. The ostensive text, says Selander, points to a phenomenon or concept, and announces 'look here, this is called…'. It often has an 'objectivist bias' in assuming that the picture of the world presented to the reader is the only one possible (ibid: 158). It is a prevalent text type in school textbooks and seems to ask students simply to accept and learn the material that is presented to them.

Narrative texts, on the other hand, tell a story with a plot and have traditionally been used especially in the teaching of history (Selander 1995). Because they are ordered according to a time sequence and usually contain relatively homogenous conjunction relationships, they are often easier to follow than other texts (Halliday & Hasan 1976).

The third type of text, the discursive text, intends not to prescribe an understanding of a phenomenon, but rather to invite the readers to deepen their own understanding of it. This type of text highlights a problem or a question by discussing facts and explanations and by presenting examples, arguments and counter-arguments (Selander 1995).

The ways in which different text types seem to open for different types of response can also be illustrated by way of the distinction between open and closed texts (Luke 1989). Closed texts present an allegedly unproblematic issue and seem to be complete already, so that there is no need for further interpretation. An open text, on the other hand, encourages cognitive and emotional involvement and opens for a range of possible responses.

Since both narrative and discursive (open) texts seem to have the potential to trigger the students' personal involvement and active reflection more than ostensive (closed) texts do, it could be argued that textbook authors should be advised to give priority to such texts. Textbook texts that the authors produce themselves could, clearly, be made discursive if the authors make themselves visible as writers of the text. Moreover, if the content of a text is presented by way of a personal voice, it will probably be easier for students to 'enter a dialogue' with the text and to respond to it in a personal way (Risager 1991).

3.6.4 The development of the students' own voice

Communication is often referred to as the very basis for our construction of identity. Aspects of our sense of self will always be confirmed, or negotiated, challenged and modified through communication and contact with others (Cortazzi & Jin 1999). Thus, if students are to develop the ability to use the foreign language for real communication purposes or, in other words, to use the foreign language as a means by which they can negotiate and construct their own identity, the educational situation must, necessarily, encourage the students to speak 'as themselves'. One obvious way to develop the students' own voice is to let them use the foreign language while using their own understandings, background and experience as a point of reference.

In a communication situation there is also a constant negotiation of *face.* This has to do with the positions that are made available for the parties involved and the

relationships that are established between them. Interlocutors seem to negotiate positions and relationships on the basis of the assumptions that they bring with them, and it has been argued that differences in face values and problems in sorting out face strategies are a very common cause of miscommunication (Scollon & Scollon 2001). In order to become aware of the negotiation of face, then, it seems important that learners are given the opportunity to experiment with and reflect on their own possible roles as users of the foreign language, in different contexts of language use.

When this is said, there is reason to be aware of the rather limited opportunities for the negotiation of face that an average classroom in the Western world may provide. Scollon & Scollon (2001) argue that the communicative approach, which is probably the prevalent approach in most foreign language classrooms in Norway, is based on ideals of 'symmetrical solidarity', ie communication between individuals who are equal in power. In many classrooms there is a face system of symmetrical solidarity not only among the students, but also between the teacher and the students. Moreover, communicative language teaching seems to be based on the idea of individually, rather than collectively, oriented people speaking to one another. When we know that hierarchical face systems are the rule in a great many situations and in many discourse communities in the world, communicative language teaching can thus be seen to obscure a central element in many communication situations outside the classroom. This reminder links up with the point made in section 3.4.1 that some of the approaches used in intercultural education may also fail to observe the complexity of understandings and communication strategies around the world.

In the negotiation of face there is always a dimension of power, and this dimension can therefore be said to have particular relevance in situations of communication between native and non-native speakers of a language. Thus, it may certainly be useful for learners of a foreign language to be aware of the power relations and struggles over meaning and linguistic behavior that are inherent in any encounter (Fairclough 1992). Learners who are aware of potential unequal relationships and the challenges involved in communication situations will probably be better prepared to muster the perseverance and confidence necessary to use the foreign language as speakers in their own right.

Some learners may, of course, want to accept native speaker competence as an ideal for their foreign language use, while others may reject it. The main concern seems to be that students are helped to reflect critically on the options that they have as users of the foreign language. Thus, many scholars argue for the need to explore texts and contexts in terms of their 'cacophony of values'[26] and to create a learning environment where the learners see themselves as the ultimate producers of meaning. Learners need to be helped to find the position from which they can have both the 'right to speak' and 'the power to impose reception' (Bourdieu 1977: 75). In this work, critical reflection on the role of native speaker competence, both in terms of language and culture skills, seems to be a crucial factor (Kramsch 1993).

In order to develop cultural awareness and feelings of empathy and respect for 'the other', the learner must, necessarily, be involved on a personal level. Mennecke (1993) argues with Adorno (1987) that it is the weak ego that needs the devaluation of 'the other' in order to ascertain the value of one's own identity. The development in the learners of self-confidence and the ability to sustain conflicts is therefore an important part of counteracting stereotyping, prejudice and ethnocentrism. In order to promote cultural awareness, Mennecke says, the teaching has to be pupil-centered and there has to be a balance of security and challenge.

It can be concluded, then, that there are many good reasons to design textbooks and teaching materials in such a way that they make room for individual response and varied and creative work with texts and contexts in the classroom. Rather than establishing 'a regime of truth'[27], texts, tasks and suggested activities in the textbooks can open for students' choices, for the voicing of personal opinions and concerns, for reflection and an active negotiation of meaning. It seems that only if the school meets the learner with openness and respect for his or her own perceived and desired positions can we expect the learner to develop attitudes of openness and understanding towards others.

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[26] The term is Bakhtin's (1986).
[27] The term is Pennycook's (1994; see section 3.6.1).

4 Materials and methods

4.1 Research design

The research materials in the present study are investigated as manifestations of a specific discourse, ie the teaching and learning of English at the lower secondary level in Norwegian compulsory school. The notion of discourse, which stems from Foucault (eg 1972), allows me to view the texts as an expression of that which, at the present time, is seen to constitute 'reality' in the teaching and learning of English at this level. The notion of discourse also opens for analysis of the texts with the intention of becoming aware of the assumptions on which they are based, and thus of challenging status quo (Pennycook 1994; Neumann 2001).

Since textbooks play a central role in Norwegian classrooms, I have concentrated the study around the materials and approaches that textbooks can offer in order to encourage work with context and culture. The investigation of the four textbook series that were written according to the 1997 Norwegian National Curriculum (*L-97*) constitutes the main body of the present study. The material and the approaches that these textbooks provide have been described and discussed with reference to the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Based on the findings of this analysis, I have then pointed out the potential for further development when it comes to encouraging work with questions of context and culture in future textbooks. My main concern is to clarify the objectives that can be linked to such work, to indicate how these objectives can be communicated to the users of the textbook and, not least, to cast light on some of the choices that can be made in accordance with the different objectives.

The requirements and the guidelines that curricular documents can provide for work with context and culture have also been looked into. The English syllabus in the 1997 National Curriculum has been the main focus of attention, and the educational and methodological thought presented here is used as a point of reference when discussing the choices that the textbook authors have made. However, this study does not aim to provide an evaluation of the degree to which intentions expressed in the curricular documents are followed up in the textbooks.

It should also be noted that comparisons between the different textbook series have been made only in order to identify the different choices that have been – and can be - made when it comes to selecting, presenting and encouraging work with the textbook materials. It has not been my concern to evaluate the different textbook series or to indicate that one textbook series is to be favored over another.

4.2 Research materials

4.2.1 National curricula

While the present study refers, first and foremost, to the 1997 Norwegian National Curriculum, I have also investigated earlier national curricula in order to provide a retrospective view of the ways in which questions of context and culture have been dealt with (see section 2.4).

Curricular documents for the teaching of English in the lower secondary school (which was then referred to as the 'middle school') were issued in 1885, 1897 and 1911, while the national curricula of 1925 and 1939 describe English as a subject in Norwegian primary school as well. My references in section 2.4.1 to the documents from 1858 and 1865 are based on Valvo's (1978) work.[28]

All these curricula present English as an optional subject. The 1957 document *Plan for en engelskundervisning for alle* ('*Curriculum for English for Everybody*') was the first curriculum to describe English as a compulsory subject for all Norwegian students. From 1960 to 1997, the teaching of English was based on four different national curricula. *Læreplan for forsøk med 9-årig skole* ('*National Curriculum for the New Nine Years' School*') was published in two different editions in 1960 and 1964. *Mønsterplan for grunnskolen* ('*National Curriculum for Compulsory School*') was the title used for the two documents that came in 1974 and 1987.

In 1997 it was decided that Norwegian children are to start school at the age of six, and the 1997 National Curriculum, *Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen* ('*The Curriculum for the 10-year Compulsory School in Norway*', '*L-97*'), describes the subject of English through ten years of education. In my analysis, I have focused

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[28] Valvo (1978) refers to the national curriculum ('normalplanen') from 1858 and a report from a committee headed by Hartvig Nissen from 1865 ('Forslag til en forandret Ordning af det høiere Skolevæsen').

on the teaching of English at the upper end of Norwegian compulsory school. I refer to this stage as 'lower secondary'.[29] In the ten-year school introduced by *L-97*, this stage comprises grades eight through ten (see Figure 4.1).

YEAR	STAGE
10	Lower
9	secondary
8	school
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	Primary school
2	
1	

Figure 4.1: Norwegian compulsory school after 1997

L-97 does not deal with evaluation and assessment. In order to look into the importance that is attached to questions of context and culture in the evaluation situation, I have therefore analyzed the different documents that complement *L-97* when it comes to these issues. The most central texts here are *Forskrift om læreplanverka for grunnskolen* ('*Regulations Related to the National Curricula for Norwegian Compulsory School'*. Kirke-, Utdannings- og Forskningsdepartementet 1997) and *Engelsk på grunnskolens ungdomstrinn. En veiledning for vurdering med og uten karakterer* ('*English in Lower Secondary School. Information About Assessment With and Without Grades'*. Eksamenssekretariatet 1999).

4.2.2 Textbooks

As Johnsen (1993: 24) points out, all kinds of texts and books can, of course, be used for educational purposes, and the term textbook is 'neither precise nor stable'. In the present study, however, the term 'textbook' refers only to books that have been written and published specifically for classroom use. All the textbooks selected for analysis

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[29] The Norwegian term for 'lower secondary school' is 'ungdomsskolen'.

have been approved by Norwegian authorities for use in lower secondary schools in Norway.[30]

I have focused on books for eighth, ninth and tenth grade primarily because the texts are more advanced at this stage than at the lower stages, and because the learners can be expected to have reached a level of linguistic, cognitive and emotional development that would allow for abstract reflection on questions related to context and culture in the foreign language (Byram & Morgan 1994). Naturally, the national curriculum also provides more extensive requirements for this stage when it comes to the cultural content of the teaching of English.

When the new national curriculum was published in 1997, four textbook series were written for the lower secondary stage, and I have analyzed all of them. The textbook series are, in order of their share of the market: *Flight* (J. W. Cappelens forlag), *New People, New Places* (NKS-forlaget), *Search* (Gyldendal) and *Catch* (Aschehoug).[31]

All the eighth grade books were published in 1997, and the books for ninth and tenth grade were published in the two following years. As the name indicates, *New People, New Places* is an adapted version of an earlier textbook series, namely *People and Places* from the 1980s. *Catch* is also an updated version of an earlier textbook series. This series was called *Catch* as well, and was originally published during the years 1993–1995. Both *Flight* and *Search* are first editions of textbooks written according to the 1997 National Curriculum.

Three of the textbook series have one book for the students for each year, containing both texts and exercises (see Table 4.1). Only *Flight* comes in the format of one textbook and one separate workbook for each grade level. All series include teacher's guides for all three years and CDs that provide recordings of the textbook texts as well as some additional material.

Catch offers an extra booklet with grammar exercises for each year, called *Catch Up. Search* includes computer-based exercise material for each grade level, and

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[30] The Norwegian system of textbook approval is explained in section 1.2, note 2.
[31] Sales information has been provided by the publishers. In addition to these series, Samlaget published a textbook for eighth grade called Point of View. Since no textbooks were published for grades nine and ten, Point of View has not been included in this analysis.

a series of color transparencies showing works of art and maps that are offered as a basis for conversation. *Search* also announces the existence of a website that provides extra information and ideas for the classroom (*Search 8 TG*: 6). However, this website consists primarily of a computer-based version of the material in *Search 9*.[32]

Flight and *New People, New Places* provide easier versions of the textbooks (see Table 4.1). *Flight Extra* consists of a learner's book and a teacher's guide for each year level that follow the original closely. *Full Speed Ahead*, which accompanies *New People, New Places,* provides mainly exercise material. The authors say in the foreword that it has been made for those who 'need some more exercise material' and that it can be used together with *New People, New Places* or with any other textbook.

My analysis refers to the material in the textbooks, workbooks (*Flight*), the teacher's guides and the CDs. The extra material and the easy versions indicated in Table 4.1 represent texts and exercises that may be used only sporadically, and they have therefore not been included in my data.

References in this and the following chapters to the different textbooks, workbooks and teacher's guides are made by use of the full book titles, except in the case of *New People, New Places* which has been abbreviated to *NPNP*.[33] In the case of *Flight,* the abbreviation *WB* has been added whenever there is reference to material in the workbooks. For all textbook series the abbreviation *TG* has been used to identify the teacher's guide.

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[32] The website was examined in the spring of 2006, at the address www.gyldendal.no/mfl
[33] It should be noted that *New People, New Places 1* is for eighth grade, *New People, New Places 2* is for ninth grade, and *New People, New Places 3* is for tenth grade in Norwegian compulsory school (see Figure 4.1). The textbooks for the different levels in the other series are referred to by use of the numbers eight, nine and ten.

Table 4.1: Components of textbook series

COMPONENT	*FLIGHT 8-10*	*NEW PEOPLE, NEW PLACES 1-3*	*SEARCH 8-10*	*CATCH 8-10*
Students' books 8. grade	*Textbook 8,* 203pp *Workbook 8,* 223pp	*NPNP 1,* 288pp	*Search* 8, 304pp	*Catch 8,* 238pp
9. grade	*Textbook 9,* 210pp *Workbook 9,* 154pp	*NPNP 2,* 302pp	*Search 9,* 320pp	*Catch 9,* 252pp
10. grade	*Textbook 10,* 228pp *Workbook 10,* 178pp	*NPNP 3,* 318pp	*Search 10,* 327pp	*Catch 10,* 271pp
Teacher's guides	*Flight 8,* 161pp *Flight 9,* 214pp *Flight 10,* 199pp	*NPNP 1,* 278pp *NPNP 2,* 284pp *NPNP 3,* 208pp	*Search 8,* 192pp *Search 9,* 192pp *Search 10,* 220pp	*Catch 8,* 144pp *Catch 9,* 159pp *Catch 10,* 133pp
Extra material			Computer based exercise material Transparencies Website	Grammar exercises: *Catch Up*
Easy versions	*Flight Extra 8-10, Flight Extra teacher's guide*	*Full Speed Ahead 1-3*		

4.3 Research methods

4.3.1 A qualitative approach

The present study draws on influences from discourse analysis in the sense that I seek not only to describe and analyze how questions of context and culture are dealt with in present-day manifestations of the teaching of English, but also to reveal the rationale and the assumptions that seem to underlie the choices that have been made in these texts. Since discourses both impose and maintain structures of meaning, they can be

seen as self-preserving systems, characterized by a certain degree of inertia. Discourse analysis can contribute to counteracting these tendencies (Neumann 2001).

Discourse studies can be summed up as being about text in context (van Dijk 1997). Following Halliday & Hasan (1985), the texts analyzed in the present study constitute each others' contexts. Thus, by analyzing them, much information can be gathered about the discourse of which they are a part. At the same time there are, of course, many other aspects of the cycle of text and context that could be taken into consideration when investigating a discourse like the teaching of English in Norwegian compulsory school.

In order to limit the scope of my study, I have decided to focus on the ideological and historical framework within which today's textbooks and curricular documents must be understood. This means that I have disregarded another common perspective in textbook research, namely that which has to do with readers' reception of the textbooks and with the ways in which they are used.[34] However, the users of the textbooks are taken into consideration in the way that the textbook materials are discussed with reference to the notion of the model reader, ie the language learner that the textbooks seem to be written for (cf Eco 1984).

My analysis of the textbook materials is linked to examples of texts and approaches. Throughout my presentation and discussion of materials related to work with questions of context and culture I have related the choices that have been made in today's textbooks to other choices that could be made in the future. While identifying challenges and opportunities that present-day materials indicate, I have also discussed ways in which future materials can be developed on the basis of the insights that my investigation provides.

The perspectives that I have used in the analysis are presented in section 4.4 below.

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[34] With reference to Choppin (1992) and Johnsen (1999), Selander & Skjelbred (2004: 63) identify three different perspectives in research on educational texts. One has to do with the development of textbooks and the production process, as well as with the ideological and political framework within which this process takes place. Another perspective focuses on the teachers' and students' evaluation of the textbooks and the ways that they are used in the classroom. The third perspective focuses on the texts proper, the selection and presentation of textbook content and on the view of knowledge and learning that seems to underlie this content.

4.3.2 A quantitative approach

4.3.2.1 Coding of prose texts

In order to identify some of the most central choices that have been made in the textbooks, I have used quantitative methods in parts of my investigation. This I have done by counting the lines of the prose texts for reading and listening, which constitute the bulk of the textbook materials, and coding them as belonging to a series of different categories. The categorization of prose texts has allowed me to determine

- the ratio of texts with and without culture-specific reference
- the distribution of texts devoted to the presentation of different countries
- the ratio of fictional and non-fictional texts
- the distribution of texts devoted to different content areas.

The categories that I have used in the coding process are described further in sections 4.4.2 - 4.4.5 below.

In my qualitative investigation of the textbook materials I distinguish between many other categories as well, related to different types of texts and exercises, topic areas and approaches. Some of these examples are discussed with reference to estimates of relative distribution and frequency, but I have not made a point of providing exact figures for the occurrence of all these examples in the textbooks.

4.3.2.2 Procedures in the coding process

The bulk of the texts that have been coded as belonging to different categories are the texts for reading that are presented in the students' books, but small informational texts that are attached to the main texts have also been coded. This applies especially to *New People, New Places*, which has several texts labeled 'info' in the books for ninth and tenth grade, and to *Catch*, which has many informational texts about the author in the margin next to the fictional texts. In *New People, New Places* there are also long and informative captions next to many of the illustrations, and these have been counted as well.

In addition, the texts for listening comprehension and the texts for extra reading have been included in the count. Tape-scripts of the texts for listening are printed in the teacher's guides for all textbook series, and texts for extra reading are included in

the back of the *Search* textbooks, in the last chapter in *New People, New Places 3* and in the *Flight* workbooks.[35] Song lyrics and poetry are discussed separately and not included in the count.

Some short texts and dialogues are presented as introductions to or as parts of an exercise and, in many cases, the notions of 'text' and 'exercise' seem to merge (eg *Catch 10*: 110). In order to avoid the difficult – and not very fruitful – work of defining what it is that constitutes the text in such sections, I have decided not to count and code such texts, but to discuss them in connection with the exercise material instead.

In *Catch*, many of the texts are presented in two or even three different versions and the same thing sometimes happens in *Search*. This is done in order for each student to be able to choose the version that suits him or her best, in terms of length and level of difficulty. Since most students probably read no more than one version, I have found it natural to count only one of the texts. As most of these texts are 'authentic' ones, I have settled for the version that is closest to the original. Sometimes, easier or more difficult versions are printed in the teacher's guide. In these cases, I have counted the text that is presented in the students' textbook.

The prose text line is the basic unit in my quantification and categorization of texts. I could, of course, have counted the words rather than the lines, as this strategy would have provided me with more accurate figures. However, the coding of texts has been done only in order to show some tendencies when it comes to the importance that is attached to different foci in the textbook materials. Therefore, I have found that the counting of lines rather than words provides clear enough indications of the choices that have been made in the textbooks.

I have defined one line as covering the whole page, from the left to the right margin. Thus, I have distinguished between whole lines and half lines and added up half lines into whole ones. When the text on a page is divided into two or three columns, I have counted the lines in each column and divided the total number by two or three.

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[35] An excerpt from *The Canterville Ghost,* which is offered as a text for listening comprehension in *Catch 8*, is presented only in the recorded material. Consequently, it has not been possible to include this text in the count.

Some texts are presented with slanted margins or even in curved shapes (eg *Flight 9*: 39; *Flight 10*: 41; *Catch 8*: 126-127). Some texts are hand-written, while others consist only of single words, for example in cartoon speech bubbles and 'authentic materials' such as tickets and posters (eg *Flight 10*: 123-125; *NPNP 1*: 48-49; *Catch 8*: 166-167). The lines of such texts have been counted by converting them into type-written ones.

The headings and the introductions to the texts have been counted when they are related to the issue that is dealt with in the text. Introductions that simply give instructions to the students such as 'Listen and read at the same time' have not been counted, as they are seen to belong to the exercise material. When introductions provide information about a text or a topic and also give instructions to the students, I have counted the lines that provide information, as shown in the part in italics in the example below:

> Read the text about Sara's holiday. You can listen at the same time if you want to. *Sara from Norway is living in Sydney for a whole year. When we meet her, it's the beginning of October and she has been in Australia for three months. The New South Wales schools are having their mid-term break, and Sara and her parents are going up to the Whitsundays for a five-day sun and swim holiday.* Read through Sara's diary of the holiday to find out what they did and didn't do (*Catch 10*: 201).

Texts that refer to several countries have been split up, and the different parts of the texts have been coded in terms of the country that they refer to. When it comes to the other categories, however, I have treated each text as a unit. This means that each text has been coded as either having or as not having culture-specific reference, as belonging to one content area and not another etc (see sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.5). Whenever a text casts light on several content areas, I have coded it in the category which, to me, reflects the text's primary focus**.**

Although this approach has allowed me to identify some of the main tendencies in the textbooks, I am well aware that the coding of texts implies a simplified picture of the textbook materials. The quantification of texts is therefore used only as the starting point for a qualitative investigation of the different texts.

In my discussion of the textbook materials, the results of the coding process are presented in terms of percentages, since this illustrates most clearly the choices that

have been made in the textbook series. The numerical data that these figures are based on are presented in an appendix.

4.4 Perspectives in the analysis

4.4.1 Explicit focus on questions of context and culture

It was argued in section 3.1.2 that, in order for students to learn about aspects of context and culture in a foreign language, these aspects need to be focused on explicitly (Kramsch 1993). Thus, the research material has been investigated in terms of the explicit references that they make to questions of context and culture. In the English syllabus, it has been natural to analyze the goal formulations and the guidelines and requirements that the document presents for the students' work with these aspects of the foreign language (see Chapter 5).

In the textbooks, I have also looked for goal formulations and statements of intention related to the students' work with questions of context and culture. Central texts here are the prefaces to the textbooks and the introductory texts in the teacher's guides (se section 6.1).

The introductions, commentaries, exercises and activities that are attached to the texts are investigated in terms of the degree to which and the ways in which they draw the students' attention to and encourage them to work with questions of context and culture. Section 6.3 focuses specifically on this issue, but the function of introductory texts and exercise materials is dealt with in the rest of my analysis as well (see chapters 7-10).

4.4.2 Culture-specific reference

The prose texts for reading and listening in the textbooks have been investigated with reference to Henriksen's (1995) and Kramsch's (1988) claim that textbooks have a long tradition of exposing students to seemingly 'culture-neutral' contexts. In my analysis I have distinguished between texts with culture-specific reference and texts without culture-specific reference, ie texts that refer to and / or can be placed within a specific cultural context on the one hand and texts that refer to unidentifiable – and seemingly culture-neutral - contexts on the other. The texts have been coded in terms

of this distinction (see section 4.3.2) and, with reference to the total number of prose text lines, I have been able to identify the ratio of texts with and without culture-specific reference in the textbooks in question.

Although most texts have been easy to classify, there are some borderline cases. Some texts provide vague clues that are identifiable only for those who have close knowledge of the geographical area and cultural community in question. One example of such a text is 'Raymond's run' (*NPNP 2*: 202-207), which can be placed in an African-American community in New York only if one discovers the brief references in the text to Harlem.[36]

Other texts can be placed within a specific cultural context only because readers are informed that the text represents an example of a specific country's literary canon. This applies, for example, to the text 'Philip' by William Somerset Maugham (*Search 9*: 23-25) and the excerpts from *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (*Flight 8*: 158-160; *NPNP 1*: 62- 64; *Search 8*: 53-54; *Catch 8*: 185-187).

In order to cast more light on the issue of culture-specific reference than the figures that emerge from the coding of texts can do, I have also investigated the texts in terms of the degree to which and the ways in which they refer to specific cultural contexts. Since the implications of these variations differ from one type of text to another, I have grouped the texts in a way that makes it possible to discuss these implications in a systematic way (see section 6.2). I have found the following categories to be useful here:

- information-focused texts
- fictional texts and other 'authentic' texts
- fairy tales and fables
- jokes and anecdotes
- textbook dialogues
- monologues and interviews.

4.4.3 Countries and cultures dealt with

The choices that are made when it comes to the countries and cultures dealt with in a foreign language course can, clearly, contribute to an understanding of what the - perhaps underlying - objectives for the course are. In order to identify the choices that

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[36] This particular text is discussed further in section 6.2.3.

have been made in the textbooks, I have coded the prose texts with culture-specific reference in terms of the country that they refer to. On the basis of this count I have been able to determine the degree to which today's textbooks maintain the tradition of focusing on The United Kingdom and the United States, whether other countries in and outside the English-speaking world are dealt with, and whether the students' own cultural background is made the topic of some of the texts (see section 7.1.2).

The discussion of the cultural material in Chapter 7 is organized according to the country that the texts refer to. In addition to indicating the importance that seems to be attached to the presentation of each country, this approach makes it possible to explore the similarities and the differences in the content that has been selected and the ways in which the different countries are presented.

Some texts provide information about a series of countries, often by describing the different ways in which an issue manifests itself in different countries (the celebration of Christmas is a typical example). Other texts describe the encounter between people from various cultural backgrounds and, thus, refer to several countries. These texts can be seen as useful starting points for intercultural learning, and they are therefore discussed in connection with other intercultural issues (see Chapter 9). Some of these texts are also drawn into the discussion of varieties of language and language use (see Chapter 8).

The English syllabus in *L-97* has been analyzed in terms of the references that it makes to specific countries in the goal formulations as well as in the requirements for each year level.

4.4.4 The text types

According to the *L*-97 requirements, the textbooks contain a large number of fictional texts. These texts can, of course, be classified as educational texts since they are included in English language textbooks and presented for educational purposes.[37] Still, it can be argued that there are fundamental differences between fictional and non-fictional texts when it comes to the opportunities that they provide for work with questions of context and culture (see section 3.5.2). In order to capture this difference,

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[37] Following Selander & Skjelbred (2004), an educational text can be defined in terms of its educational context, intention and use.

I have therefore discussed these texts separately, in sections 7.2 and 7.3. As a basis for my discussion and as an indication of the importance that is attached to the two types of text, I have identified the ratio of fictional and non-fictional texts by counting and coding the prose text lines (see section 7.1.1).

I have also discussed the songs, poetry and the illustrations separately, first and foremost in terms of the content that they provide and the ways in which students are expected to work with them (see section 7.4). The illustrations that have been included in the textbook series are also analyzed with reference to Kress & Leeuwen's (1996) theories.[38]

My analysis is based on other ways of distinguishing between text types as well. One categorization has already been mentioned, in connection with my discussion of texts with and without culture-specific reference. Since the categorization of texts has been related directly to my discussion of the cultural material in the textbooks and the objectives that seem to be linked to it, I have not found traditional typologies based, for example, on the distinction between descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative and instructive texts to be relevant for my purposes (cf eg Werlich 1975).

Instead, I refer to Risager's (1991) distinction between macro and micro level texts. This allows me to cast light on the emphasis that can be attached to providing students with factual information about a foreign country on the one hand and with encounters with 'real' people on the other. In connection with my discussion of the ways in which students seem to be expected to relate to the cultural material, I have used Selander's (1995) distinction between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts (see Chapter 10).[39]

4.4.5 The content areas

In order to systematize my discussion of the cultural content that students are provided with, I have grouped the prose texts into different content areas. The categories that I have used have emerged from the total body of texts. At the same time, they have been

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[38] Kress & Leeuwen's theories are presented in section 3.5.3.
[39] Risager's (1991) notion of micro and macro level texts is presented in sections 2.4.6 and 3.2.2, while Selander's (1995) distinction between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts is discussed in section 3.6.3.

formulated in a way that makes it possible to discuss the texts with reference to the different objectives that can be linked to work with questions of context and culture in a foreign language course:

- History, cultural heritage
- Contemporary issues and general information
- Presentation of individual people.

Since many of the fictional texts deal with events that take place only in a fictional world, it has been natural to categorize these texts in terms of the type of fiction that they represent rather than the content that they provide. Again, the categories have emerged from the total body of fictional texts in the textbooks:

- Canon, historical texts
- Children's literature, teenage literature
- Crime, mystery, entertainment
- Fairy tales, legends, myths.

The prose texts that have to do with the United Kingdom and the United States, which constitute the great majority of texts, have been coded in terms of the different categories. In this way, I have been able to determine the importance that is attached to different content areas in the selection of non-fictional texts and to different types of fictional literature related to these two countries.

This, in itself, provides an indication of the objectives that are seen to be most important in the textbook series. It is natural to think, for example, that an emphasis on history and cultural heritage both in non-fictional and fictional texts reflects a desire to provide students with knowledge about the foreign country's 'high' culture. Texts that provide information about contemporary issues, on the other hand, could indicate a desire to contribute to the development of the students' socio-cultural insight, while texts that present individual people could aim to develop the students' knowledge about and attitudes towards 'the other'.

However, any text can, obviously, serve a number of purposes, and I have therefore discussed the texts from each category in terms of other perspectives as well. Thus, in my discussion of the factual information that the textbooks provide about different countries I refer both to Byram & Morgan's (1994) concept of

'representative' pictures of foreign countries and to Brøgger's (1992) notion of 'dominant culture patterns'. Both the non-fictional and the fictional texts that present individual people are discussed with reference to Risager's (1991) argument that students ought to meet 'real' people in everyday situations. Last, but not least, I have investigated the cultural material in terms of Sercu's (1998) call for topics to be 'pupil appropriate'.[40]

When it comes to the types of English and English language use that the students are prepared for, I have investigated the degree to which students are exposed to and informed about different varieties of the language and different conventions of language use. I have looked at the opportunities that the textbook materials offer for work with questions of appropriacy and I have discussed the contexts of language use that seem to be presented as the most obvious ones for the students' use of English as well (see Chapter 8).

The content areas have also been investigated in terms of their potential for intercultural learning. Texts that address differences between cultures and cultural practices around the world are central here, and so are texts that describe cultural encounters, ie situations that involve members of different cultural groups (see sections 9.1 and 9.2). I have also investigated the ways in which 'the other' is presented in the cultural material, and discussed some of the texts in terms of challenges and opportunities that can be related to the presentation of 'us and 'them' in a foreign language textbook (see section 9.3).

4.4.6 Exercises

Since the focus of attention in the present study is on questions of context and culture, I have not analyzed the many language practice exercises in the textbooks and the exercises that focus on purely linguistic aspects of the texts. I do, however, address the fact that there are many more such exercises than exercises that encourage work with questions of context and culture.[41]

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[40] These concepts are presented in section 3.2.2.
[41] As indicated in section 4.3.1, this is not done on the basis of exact figures, but rather with reference to estimates of frequency and to concrete examples of questions and exercises.

The call for an explicit focus on questions of context and culture is central in my analysis of the exercises and activities (see section 4.4.1), and the exercises are discussed in terms of the degree to which and the ways in which they help draw the students' attention to aspects of context and culture in the textbook texts and also in their own language production. Examples are also given of exercises that can be used for intercultural learning, specifically those that can help students take the perspective of 'the other' (see section 9.3.3).

In connection with the discussion of the students' positions vis-à-vis the cultural material in the textbooks, the exercises are discussed with reference to the distinction between 'open' and 'closed' questions, and to the call for students to be able to link up the new material with their own previous knowledge and experience (see section 10.2.2).

4.4.7 The students' positions

In order to make work with questions of context and culture possible, the content of the texts that students are offered is, of course, crucial. But equally important, perhaps, are the ways in which students are encouraged to relate to the textbook materials and the positions that they are offered as learners and users of the foreign language.

I have investigated these issues, first and foremost, by way of the opportunities that students are given to take charge of their own learning processes. Thus, I have looked at the possibilities that the textbooks provide for the students' own choice of materials and approaches (see section 10.1).

I have also investigated the ways in which texts and exercises address the learners and, thus, how students seem to be encouraged to relate to the teaching materials (see section 10.2). The distinctions between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts and between open and closed questions are central here.

My final focus is on the roles that the textbooks seem to make available for their 'model readers' (Eco 1984). The textbook as a whole is discussed here, ie the materials and the ways in which they are presented and justified. I have identified these roles: 'The language learner', 'the knowledgeable, opinionated person', 'the tourist', 'the native speaker' and 'the self' (see section 10.3).

4.5 Validity and reliability

The present study's focus on textbooks is motivated by the central position that textbooks have in Norwegian compulsory education. Since only a limited number of textbook series are in use and since teachers seem to rely so heavily on them, it is natural to believe that the textbooks represent a valid source of information about materials and approaches in Norwegian classrooms for the teaching of English (Johnsen 1989). Although the actual teaching and learning situation may materialize quite independently from the intentions of textbook authors and the contents of a textbook, there can be no doubt that the texts, topics and exercises that the textbooks offer have great impact on what goes on in the actual teaching and learning situation.

Textbooks probably constitute a decisive factor when it comes to giving direction to the teachers' and the learners' work and, together with curricular documents, they also play a crucial role in clarifying the objectives and the main principles for the teaching of English (Cortazzi & Jin 1999). In order to investigate – and contribute to the development of - classroom practices, then, critical analysis of textbooks can thus be regarded as a necessary and essential endeavour.

Research has indicated that textbooks are difficult to change (Erling 2000), and textbooks may therefore contribute to preserving rather than challenging status quo both when it comes to the content and the procedures of the lessons. This situation can be said to make it even more important to focus on the opportunities, the challenges and the possible limitations that they represent. Moreover, when trying to bring about changes, existing practices seem to be both a natural and useful point of reference (Holliday 1994). Thus, in focusing on the degree to which the objectives and principles for work with questions of context and culture are made visible in today's textbooks and in discussing the choices that have been and can be made, I trust that the present study will, in fact, be relevant for the development of future classroom practices.

When it comes to the reliability of the present study, I have already discussed some of the challenges related to the counting of prose text lines (see section 4.3.2.2). The categorization of the prose texts represents another challenge. The grouping of texts has often been unproblematic, for example when deciding whether a text is

fictional or non-fictional, which type of fiction a text represents or which country a text refers to. The categorization of texts as having to do with one content area rather than another, and as referring to or not referring to specific cultural contexts, however, is based on my own, subjective understanding of the texts. In order to increase reliability I have therefore based my discussion on descriptions of concrete examples of texts and topics and I have also tried to make my reasoning as explicit and well-founded as possible.

The formulation of the categories is, in itself, based on my own understanding of the textbook materials. The theoretical perspectives which I have used as a basis for my analysis and my discussions are also, naturally, the result of my own, subjective considerations of which issues it is most important to address. At the same time, I am well aware that these considerations are heavily influenced by the context of which I, as a teacher of English and a teacher trainer in Norway, am a part. Clearly, other perspectives could have been taken, and other points could have been brought in. In order to enhance reliability here, I have tried to explain and state the grounds for my choices as best as I can and I have also made an effort to describe my own frames of reference as explicitly as possible.

5 The 1997 National Curriculum (L-97)

The textbooks that are analyzed and discussed in the present study have all been written according to the 1997 Norwegian National Curriculum. Some of the choices that the producers of these textbooks have made can, obviously, be traced to the pedagogical ideas, the requirements and the guidelines that this document presents. As a point of reference for the subsequent analysis of English language textbooks, this chapter therefore presents and discusses the ways in which questions of context and culture are dealt with in the English syllabus in *L-97*.

The English syllabus is organized in three different parts. Part one, the introduction, places English in its educational context and explains the rationale for the subject, its aims and its contents. Part two states the general aims for the subject through all ten years of Norwegian compulsory school. Part three presents the aims for each one of the three stages (primary, intermediate and lower secondary stages) and the requirements for each grade level.

Section 5.1 in this chapter discusses the goal formulations and the introduction to the syllabus, while section 5.2 investigates the requirements and guidelines for the different grade levels. Naturally, I refer to the whole syllabus and also to some of the overall principles and guidelines for Norwegian compulsory education presented in the curriculum, but my main focus is on the lower secondary stage.[42] *L-97* does not deal with evaluation and assessment, so section 5.3 looks into the documents that complement *L-97* when it comes to these issues.

5.1 Goals and objectives

5.1.1 The general aims for the teaching of English

According to the *L*-97 English syllabus, the general aims for the teaching of English through ten years of compulsory education are

- to develop pupils' ability to use spoken and written English, and to encourage them to interact with people from English-speaking and other cultures

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[42] See section 2.3.1 for a discussion of the notions 'curriculum' and 'syllabus'.

- to develop pupils' awareness of communicative situations and English usage and their perspectives on the foreign culture as well as their own
- to promote pupils' insight into what it is to learn English and their capacity to take charge of their own learning, in order to give all pupils good opportunities to learn the language and lay foundations for further learning in English and learning of other languages (*C-99*: 240).[43]

It could be argued that the English syllabus' goal formulations refer, at least indirectly, to all the three main objectives that, traditionally, have been linked to work with questions of context and culture in foreign language education.[44] In emphasizing the need to 'encourage [students] to interact with people in other countries', the syllabus could be said to call for a type of information about and experiences with these countries that will trigger the students' interest.

The second point clearly addresses the need for students to be aware of contextual factors in the communication situation. The reference to the need for students to develop their 'perspectives on the foreign culture as well as their own' could also be seen as a call for work that supports the development of the students' communication skills.

But this formulation could be interpreted as having to do with affective objectives as well. Such an interpretation is a natural one, since one of the overall objectives for Norwegian education is to 'counteract prejudice and discrimination, and foster mutual respect and tolerance between groups with different modes of life' (*C-99*: 26; see section 1.1).

It is a central concern in Norwegian compulsory school to contribute to the strengthening of the students' awareness of their own culture and to the development of understanding for others. One of the introductory chapters in *L-97,* 'Principles and Guidelines for Compulsory Education', puts it this way:

> Pupils with secure identities rooted in their own cultures are better placed to meet other cultures [...]. Familiarity with one's own cultural background and knowledge of other cultures are prerequisites for critical reflection and for the ability to resolve conflicts. Education should promote international understanding and solidarity across borders, and

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[43] See note 1, section 1.1.
[44] These objectives are presented in sections 2.1.2 and 3.1.1.

schools must make the most of the knowledge and understanding which minority groups and Norwegians with other cultural backgrounds can contribute. Education must counteract discriminatory attitudes and emphasize the value of coexistence with other people and of work for peace (*C-99*: 70).

The last point in the general aims for the teaching of English addresses issues of 'learning to learn' and learner autonomy. At first sight this may not have much to do with questions of context and culture in a foreign language course. However, as argued in section 3.6, the opportunities that students are given to define their own needs and to develop their own identities as users of the foreign language may, in fact, be crucial in the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the foreign language classroom.

5.1.2 The objectives for the lower secondary stage

The 'subject-related objectives' that are stated for each stage paraphrase the general aims for the subject and specify them. For the lower secondary stage, the objectives are formulated as follows:

> ***Using the language***
> Pupils should further develop their ability to communicate in spoken and written English in various situations.
> ***Knowledge of the English language and culture and of one's own learning***
> Pupils should develop insight into the language as communication and as an expression of culture. They should learn about historical and current developments in English-speaking countries. They should develop insight into how they can work with the process of learning English, and become increasingly independent as users of the language (*C-99*: 244).

Here, questions of context and culture are, first and foremost, linked to the development of the students' communication skills. Students are expected to consider 'various situations' in their work with the language, and the need for insight into 'language as communication and as an expression of culture' could also be interpreted as having to do with the students' ability to communicate.

Contrary to the general aims, these objectives call explicitly for the students to 'learn about historical and current developments in English-speaking countries'. Such information can, of course, be linked to the development of the students' language

skills and also to the development of their intercultural awareness. However, the phrase that is used seems, most of all, to echo the 'background studies' tradition mentioned in section 2.4.2.

5.1.3 The introduction to the syllabus

In the introduction to the English syllabus, the study of English is said to comprise four main areas, namely

1 Encountering the spoken and written language
2 Using the language
3 Knowledge of the English language and its cultural context
4 Knowledge of one's own language learning (*C-99*: 239).

Using the language is presented as 'the core of the subject, both the means and the end' (*C-99*: 239). The other areas are said to support this primary one. In this way, work with the 'cultural context' of the language (point 3) is linked, explicitly, to the development of the students' communication skills. This is also done in the passage where the introduction explains that

[Learning to use a foreign language] is not a matter of language skills alone, but of the ability to communicate across cultural divides (*C-99*: 239).

But the areas of study listed under points 1, 3 and 4 above are also presented as 'ends in themselves'. Thus, the introduction indicates that questions of context and culture play a dual role in the students' work with English. On the one hand, insight into such questions is seen to support the development of the students' communication skills. On the other hand, foreign language skills are seen as tools in the development of the students' knowledge about the world, and one aim in foreign language education is to help students develop such knowledge (Fenner 2005).

The introduction does not specify the parts of the 'cultural context' that students are expected to learn about. One formulation seems to open for work with a wide range of aspects related to language and culture:

…foreign language learning is not only viewed as skills training but also as an educational process, involving socialization and the development of language awareness and cultural awareness (*C-99*: 237).

It is worth noticing, however, that the Norwegian word that has been translated into 'educational process' is 'dannelse' (German: 'Bildung'), a word which, traditionally, is associated with a certain familiarity with 'high' culture (Aase 2005). Here, it could seem that the introduction points to and emphasizes the importance of the students' work with the many texts from Anglo-American literary canon that are mentioned in the grade level requirements (see section 5.2.1.2).

The introduction also points to the role that foreign language education can have when it comes to the development of the students' cultural awareness and understanding. However, it can be argued that the text expresses ambitions only when it comes to 'laying a foundation' for this development. The passage quoted below seems to indicate that the teaching of English is not expected to actually concern itself with the development of attitudes of respect and tolerance:

> Learning foreign languages presents pupils with the opportunity to become acquainted with other cultures. Such insight lays the foundations for greater respect and tolerance, contributes to new ways of thinking, and broadens their understanding of their own cultural roots. This gives them a stronger sense of their identity (*C-99*: 237).

5.2 Requirements and guidelines for the lower secondary stage

5.2.1 Work with cultural issues

5.2.1.1 The choice of countries and cultures

In the introduction to the English syllabus, English is presented as an obvious first choice when it comes to foreign language education in Norway first and foremost because it is a world language. In the general aims for the teaching of English, it is also underlined that students are to be encouraged to interact with people from English-speaking as well as other cultures. Thus, the syllabus could be said to open for work with cultural questions related to a variety of different countries. But English is also presented as a natural language to learn because it represents 'the language area with which we have the closest links in terms of geography, culture, and language history' (*C-99*: 237). Here, the reference is, clearly, to the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the specifications of texts and topics for each year level, these two countries are the main focus of attention. All the cultural topics suggested are related to 'English-speaking countries', but whenever specific fictional texts are recommended, the authors are all British and American (with one exception, see section 5.2.1.2). Many of the other texts refer to British and American culture as well, such as the legend of Robin Hood and famous speeches by people like Winston Churchill, Chief Seattle and Martin Luther King, Jr. (*C-99:* 244-6).

It could be argued that the introduction's emphasis on English as a world language is followed up indirectly in the rest of the syllabus in the repeated reminders that students ought to establish contacts with people in other parts of the world, for example by exchanging letters with a class in another country (*C-99*: 243–245). It is also mentioned that students should be encouraged to select texts themselves, and no requirements are given that these texts need to represent specific English-speaking countries.

5.2.1.2   The choice of texts

The teaching materials that are suggested for each year level consist, to a large extent, of 'authentic' texts, ie texts that have not been 'specifically designed for language learning' (*C-99*: 238). The texts suggested range from nursery rhymes and fairy tales to cartoons, song lyrics and newspaper articles.

The syllabus does not explain explicitly why it is important for the students to work with authentic texts. However, the many texts that are suggested from children's literature and from popular culture indicate that one concern is to link up with the students' own interests and also with the experiences that they may have with English outside the classroom. As mentioned in section 3.5.1, this can be seen as a necessary prerequisite in order for students to experience the texts as 'authentic' in their own situation.

The many 'authentic texts' may also be seen as the main resource in the development of the students' insight into the 'language as interaction' and 'language as an expression of culture', phrases which are mentioned repeatedly throughout the syllabus (eg *C-99*: 239, 242, 244). For each grade level, a series of text-based activities are suggested that clearly aim to constitute a continuous 'voyage of discovery' into the

world of English.[45] It is worth noticing, however, that the syllabus does not provide any further explanation of what these phrases mean, nor does it indicate ways in which insight into the relationship between language, context and culture can be brought about.

High quality literary texts occupy a central position in the syllabus, not least for the lower secondary stage.[46] 36 specific literary texts are suggested (or in some cases, non-specified texts by specific authors), encompassing children's books, poems, short stories and excerpts from novels and plays. 25 of these references are to British authors, 10 to authors from the United States. Only *Gulliver's Travels* by the Irish author Jonathan Swift is mentioned from a different country.

The syllabus provides no explanation for the selection of specific authors and texts, but the underlying assumption seems to be that the recommended texts will provide the students with motivating input and with good and representative examples of language and language use. It is worth noticing that the students are not expected to 'learn about' these texts, their authors or their significance. Rather, it is said that the texts are supposed to 'inspire [the students], arouse their curiosity, and serve as models for them when they express themselves in English' (*C-99*: 238).

At the same time, the large number of well-known texts and authors indicates clearly that an important aim for the teaching of English is to make the students familiar with parts of British and American literary canon. In this way, the English syllabus must be said to reflect the tradition in foreign language education of providing the students with knowledge about 'high culture', ie elitist manifestations of the target cultures, and also the tradition of linking English language instruction primarily to information about the United Kingdom and the United States.

5.2.1.3 The choice of topics

Cultural topics, which all aim to provide students with information about 'English-speaking countries', are suggested for all year levels. The topics that are suggested for the lower classes are related to everyday life and expressions of 'small c culture'.[47] In

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[45] The term is used by Arnestad (1997).
[46] *L-97* is the first national curriculum to present a list of recommended literary texts since a reference to two specific authors in the 1885 syllabus, and a list of suggested literature in the 1957 syllabus.
[47] The term is explained in section 2.1.2.3.

the first grade, students are expected to 'start to learn about how children in English-speaking countries live' (*C-99*: 240), and this topic is followed by 'Family and friends' (second grade), 'Everyday life and festivals' (third grade), 'Home' and 'Food and drink' (fourth grade) and 'traditions, customs, leisure and hobbies' (fifth grade).

The goal formulations and the introduction state that the students' encounters with foreign cultures are supposed to provide insight also into their own culture, and the topics that are suggested for the lower grades clearly open for a comparison between the foreign culture and the students' own. However, in the grade level requirements, the need for learners to 'discover differences and similarities between their own way of life and the way of life in English-speaking countries' is mentioned only for the third grade (*C-99*: 241).

From sixth grade on, students are expected to work with topics that can be associated with the 'background studies' tradition. In the sixth grade, the topics suggested are 'history and geography', while students in the seventh grade are supposed to work with 'various themes from the past and the present, such as historical events and prominent persons' (*C-99*: 244). For the lower secondary level, the content requirements are specified even more, under a general reference to the study of 'historical and current developments in English-speaking countries' (*C-99*: 244). In the eight grade, students are supposed to learn about 'schools and education, current affairs and art' (*C-99*: 245), while work in the ninth grade should provide knowledge about 'geographical conditions, important events and people, and music, films, and graphic art' (*C-99*: 245).

It can be argued that the requirements for years six through nine echo the tradition of teaching rather arbitrarily chosen facts about the target countries, a tradition which has been criticized for providing students with only fragmented and superficial pictures of the foreign country in question (see section 2.4.6). However, it is worth noticing that the English syllabus suggests that the cultural topics should spring from the texts that the students work with and the contacts that they are supposed to have with people in other countries. Thus, the topics that *L-97* mentions may appear more as a suggested 'carrier content' in the language learning situation than as a body of knowledge that students are expected to learn.

The tenth grade requirements add another dimension to the students' work with cultural topics. Here, the main focus is on international issues such as 'social relations, natural, environmental and cultural protection, international cooperation, the rights of indigenous peoples including the Sami, and war and peace' (*C-99*: 246). In indicating that students ought to be able to use English when working with and discussing these topics, the syllabus could be said to point towards situations of international communication. At the same time, the requirements could be interpreted as a call for work across the curriculum, as many of the issues are to be covered in other subjects as well.

5.2.2 Work with cultural and situational contexts

The grade level requirements do not seem to aim to prepare the students for language use in any particular domains or any specific situational contexts. The great scope of texts and topics suggested indicates, above all, that students are to be given basic skills in English that can be used in a number of different arenas. The approach seems to correspond with the introductory remarks in the syllabus that Norwegian students will need English both in their private and their professional lives, in a number of different settings.

When it comes to the development of the students' ability to use the language appropriately in different contexts this is, as already mentioned, addressed in the goal formulations. However, the call for the development of the pupils' 'awareness of communicative situations and language usage' (*C-99*: 240) is not followed up in any systematic way in the grade level requirements. The only direct reference to the relationship between language and context can be found in the requirements for fourth grade, where students are expected to 'gradually perceive that different situations call for different ways of using the language' (*C-99*: 242). In grades eight, nine and ten, students are expected to acquaint themselves with different 'varieties of English', but it is unclear whether the reference is to geographical, social or situational varieties, or perhaps all of them.

Only one reference is made to the need for students to be prepared to meet different conventions of language use. This is also in the requirements for fourth grade, where students are expected to talk about forms of politeness in their own

culture and in English-speaking countries. Although the syllabus attaches great emphasis to the students' language use and to the production of their own texts, no mention is ever made of the need for students to consider the recipient or the wider context of these texts.[48]

It could, of course, be argued that the need to consider questions of context and appropriate language use is implied whenever there is talk about developing the students' communication skills and of providing them with knowledge about the 'language as interaction and an expression of culture'. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the syllabus could have done more both when it comes to drawing its readers' attention to the role that context plays in situations of language use and also in indicating how questions of context and appropriate language use can be worked with. Since these are new perspectives in an English language syllabus in Norway, it could be argued that more concrete descriptions of strategies and approaches would have been useful.

5.2.3 Work with intercultural issues

It has already been pointed out that one of the overall objectives of Norwegian compulsory education is to 'promote international understanding and solidarity across borders'(*C-99*: 70), and that the goal formulations and the introduction in the English syllabus, to some extent, follow up this focus on intercultural issues. In the grade level requirements, however, little is done to indicate how the development of the students' 'perspectives on the foreign culture as well as their own' is supposed to happen.

The texts and topics suggested represent, of course, an abundance of opportunities for the students to learn about other cultures and to reflect on cultural differences, but no mention is made of the potential that the material represents for intercultural learning. The grade level requirements also fail to indicate how students can be helped to develop the ability to 'communicate across cultural divides' (*C-99*: 239).

One could, perhaps, say that there is a reference to the need for the teaching of English to concern itself with intercultural issues in the call for students to have

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[48] It is worth noticing, however, that the authorities' guidelines for final assessment of the students at the end of grade 10 present the students' 'awareness of the reader' as an important criterion when it comes to evaluating the students' texts (see section 5.3).

contacts with people in other countries, and to link work with cultural topics to situations of such contact. Although they are not focused on, there are obvious opportunities here for students to reflect on their own cultural frames of reference and to develop attitudes of empathy and understanding.

However, since they do not explicitly address the need to work with intercultural issues in the teaching of English, it could be argued that the grade level requirements reflect the seemingly low ambition level in the introduction to the syllabus when it states that work with foreign cultures in the English classroom is supposed only to 'lay the foundation' for the development of increased respect and tolerance.

5.2.4 The students' own positions

L-97 presents 'Knowledge of one's own language learning' as a central element in the study of English, and dwells on the importance of developing the students' insight into the process of learning English and of their independence and capacity as language learners (*C-99*: 239). This aspect of foreign language learning is linked both to the opportunities that students should be given to choose their own materials and approaches and to the need to let them 'find the space they need to freely express themselves in and within the language' (*C-99*: 238).

The curriculum makes repeated references to the need for students to choose their own approaches to the learning of English and it is also indicated that, from the great variety of texts and topic areas suggested, students should be allowed to select the material that they find to be most conducive to their own language learning. For ninth and tenth grade it is mentioned explicitly that the students should be encouraged to choose some of the texts for reading. Of course, with its guidelines for texts that are to be included in the course, the curriculum provides many limitations to the possibilities for the students' personal choice of learning materials. Nevertheless, it must be concluded that the syllabus makes clear attempts to arrive at the type of balance between the authority of the educational system and learner autonomy described in section 3.6.1.

The introduction to the syllabus emphasizes the need for students to work with the many texts on their own terms and to be allowed to construct their own

understanding of them. This point is followed up in the requirements for each grade level especially in connection with the texts that are suggested. Students are expected to 'study' and 'work with', but also to 'discover', 'explore', 'discuss', 'experience', 'get an impression of', 'investigate' and 'interpret' the different texts.

When it comes to the cultural topics, however, the students' independent meaning making seems to be less emphasized. Here, learners are expected to 'study' and 'gradually extend their knowledge of' cultures and social conditions in English-speaking countries. It can be argued that this, too, contributes to the impression that *L-97* falls into the background studies tradition in its guidelines for the students' work with cultural issues.

At the same time, there are many references in the curriculum to the need for students to express their own thoughts and their own reactions to the texts they read. There are also repeated calls for the students to talk about their own experiences and to present their own opinions. In tenth grade, for example, students are expected to 'read at least one novel or easy reader of their own choice and give their impressions and views of what they read' and also to 'converse and discuss, practice presenting their own ideas, and discuss current affairs' (*C-99*: 246). In other words, there are many reminders that students should be encouraged to develop their own voice as speakers of English, and to be able to use the language for their own purposes.

The syllabus does not address the issue of having to decide which variety of English the students should learn. While the 1974 and 1987 syllabuses encouraged students to learn either standard British or American pronunciation, *L-97* does not attach any importance to such a choice. Emphasis seems to be placed on the development of functional and personal language use, rather than on correct language according to a specific norm. This could be said to represent a break with the tendency to present native speaker competence as the goal for foreign language instruction mentioned in section 2.2.3. However, since this possible break is not explicitly stated, it may be overshadowed by the fact that so many of the suggested texts and topics are

linked to the English-speaking world and particularly to the United Kingdom and the United States.[49]

5.3 Assessment

Assessment is not mentioned in *L-97,* but rules and regulations concerning evaluation are presented in a separate document (Kirke- Utdannings- og Forskningsdepartementet 1997). Here it is stated that students are to get one grade for their written English and one for their oral English at the end of the lower secondary stage, and that their competence is to be assessed in terms of the goals and the content that *L-97* describes for each grade level.

Further guidelines for assessment are presented in a number of publications. *Elevvurdering* (Kyrkje- Utdannings- og Forskingsdepartementet 1998) discusses assessment in general terms, while *Engelsk på grunnkolens ungdomstrinn* (Eksamenssekretariatet 1999) addresses specific issues related to assessment of the students' competence in English. In addition, guidelines are published in connection with the final, written exam in English for each year (eg Utdanningsdirektoratet 2005).

Naturally, the main emphasis in the authorities' guidelines is on the students' ability to understand English and to communicate by way of relatively correct and idiomatic English. But the need for the students to be able to document knowledge about English-speaking countries is also mentioned (Eksamenssekretariatet 1999: 9). The guidelines related to the 2005 final exam elaborate on the importance of cultural knowledge:

> Good language is to little avail if the content is not lifted beyond a superficial level. A student who shows willingness to answer the questions should be given credit for this, even if there are errors and shortcomings in his or her language. It should also be remembered that knowledge about English-speaking countries is one of the objectives in *L-97* and, whenever the question asks for it, the students should demonstrate such knowledge. Also, students should be given credit if

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[49] It should be noted that this point is cleared up in the guidelines that complement *L-97* on issues of assessment. Here, it is stated that 'There is a long tradition in Norwegian schools of regarding different varieties of English (British, American Scottish etc) as having equal worth. Students should therefore not be corrected if they use different regional varieties of the language, in speech as well as in writing' (Eksamenssekretariatet 1999: 7. My translation).

they use cultural knowledge to develop their answer, even if the question does not explicitly demand this (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2005: 5).[50]

When it comes to questions of context and appropriate language use, this is mentioned only indirectly in the guidelines for assessment of the students' oral English. The following formulation is used:

> The most important criterion [for the assessment of oral skills] must be whether or not students are able to communicate successfully and to get their message across, and that shortcomings in their oral production do not cause communication to break down (Eksamenssekretariatet 1999: 8).[51]

In the guidelines that address the assessment of written skills, there are repeated references to the need for students to demonstrate 'awareness of the reader'. Moreover, in order to get a top grade, it is stressed that students need to use language that is idiomatic and 'adapted to the situation' (Eksamenssekretariatet 1999; Utdanningsdirektoratet 2005). Here, then, the guidelines are more specific than the syllabus itself when it comes to emphasizing the role that context plays in situations of language use.

5.4 Summary and discussion

In its description of English as a subject throughout ten years of compulsory school in Norway, the 1997 National Curriculum refers to questions of culture and context in different ways. Work with such questions is, first and foremost, linked to the development of the students' practical language skills. Both the goal formulations and the introduction to the English syllabus refer to awareness of communicative situations and of cultural differences as important ingredients in a person's ability to communicate in a foreign language.

But the syllabus indicates that other objectives are linked to the students' work with cultural texts and topics as well. First of all, students are expected to work with a variety of 'authentic' texts. From the central position that texts from British and American literary canon are given in the requirements for each year level, one

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[50] My translation. While an official translation of *L-97* exists (*C-99*), the documents related to assessment have not been translated into English.
[51] My translation. See previous note.

understands that a main concern in the teaching of English according to *L-97* is to familiarize students with parts of these countries' 'high culture'.

The syllabus also requires that students learn about English-speaking countries, and the cultural topics that are suggested for each year level can be said to reflect the 'background studies' tradition mentioned in section 2.4.2. At the same time, it is stated that the students' encounters with foreign countries and cultures are expected to contribute to – or at least 'lay a foundation for' - the development of their cultural awareness and understanding.

Although the English syllabus indicates several objectives for the students' work with questions of context and culture, it must be concluded that these objectives are not stated very clearly. Some inconsistencies in the text also contribute to the impression that the objectives related to questions of context and culture and the ways in which they can be reached remain rather unclear.

One inconsistency lies in the fact that the syllabus argues for the importance of English, first and foremost, in terms of its position as a world language, but focuses exclusively on the English-speaking world, the United Kingdom and the United States in particular, in its suggestions for work with cultural materials. Clearly, if the students' work with cultural issues is linked to the development of their ability to 'communicate across cultural divides' (*C*-99: 239), insight into other countries and cultures would be equally relevant.

There also seems to be a discrepancy between the objectives for work with questions of context and culture that are stated initially in the document and the texts and topics that are presented in the grade level requirements. While it is obvious that the syllabus aims to expose students to high quality texts and to provide them with insight into certain aspects of the English-speaking world, it is less obvious why exactly this material has been selected in order to support the development of the students' communication skills.

It also seems strange that the intentions expressed in the syllabus' introduction and goal formulations related to the development of the students' ability to 'communicate across cultural divides' and of their respect and understanding for other cultures are not followed up in the grade level requirements. These issues can, of

course, be addressed in the students' work with the texts and topics that are suggested, and in the contacts that students are encouraged to have with people in other countries. Still, it is worth noticing that no specific guidelines are provided as to how such questions should be dealt with in the classroom situation, and no reminders are made that these perspectives need to be included.

The syllabus has a more consistent focus on questions of learner autonomy. It is mentioned repeatedly that students should be given opportunities to choose some of their own learning materials and, above all, their own approaches to language learning. They should also be allowed and encouraged to construct their own meanings in encounters with texts and other cultural expressions, and they should be helped to use the foreign language for their own purposes. Throughout the curriculum, these intentions are followed up by way of constant references to the need to let students 'meet', 'discover' and 'explore' the foreign language and culture, and there are also repeated reminders to let the students talk about their own experiences and to express their own views.

6 The focus on questions of context and culture in the textbooks

This chapter investigates the degree to which and some of the ways in which present-day textbooks draw the users' attention to questions of context and culture in the teaching of English. The chapter starts by looking at the references to such questions in the first texts that meet the student, namely the prefaces, chapter headings and tables of content. Section 6.1 also investigates the introductory texts in the teacher's guides and the signals that are sent here about the role that questions of context and culture can play in the teaching of English.

Section 6.2 follows up the point made in section 2.4.6 that, traditionally, many texts designed for foreign language learning have seemed to reflect a 'culturally neutral universe' or, without making the learners aware of this, made references only to the students' own culture (Henriksen 1995; Kramsch 1988). Such an approach has been criticized for several reasons, and voices have been raised for the need to study texts in specific contexts so that students can be helped to learn about aspects of context and culture in situations of language use (see section 3.1.2).

In order to determine the degree to which the textbooks pursue the tradition of presenting seemingly culture-neutral contexts, I have coded and classified the prose texts as referring to or as not referring to specific cultural contexts. Section 6.2.1 presents the results of this classification. However, there are many nuances when it comes to such references and, in connection with some types of texts, one can also ask how relevant the call for culture-specific reference is. Sections 6.2.2 – 6.2.7 therefore look into different categories of texts and discuss how the question of culture-specific reference applies to them.

Section 6.3 presents some of the texts that accompany the prose texts, such as introductions and exercises, and describes the degree to which – and the ways in which – these texts are used to help establish specific contexts and to draw the students' attention to aspects of context and culture in the text.

6.1 References to questions of context and culture in introductory texts

6.1.1 Prefaces, chapter headings and tables of content

One should perhaps not read too much into the preface of a foreign language textbook. It is a fair guess that neither students nor teachers pay much attention to these texts, if they read them at all. Nevertheless, since it would be natural to expect the authors to state their main intentions with the books here, the prefaces to the textbooks under scrutiny in the present study may be worth some comments.

The prefaces are the only texts in the four textbook series where the authors let their own voice be heard, and where they explicitly address each individual student.[52] What is it, then, that they wish to communicate on such a unique occasion?

The prefaces are quite different, but they also have several features in common. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that they all refer to the students' work with English as something that they are obliged to do as part of their compulsory education. Consequently, they concentrate primarily on informing the students about the organization of the material in the book. None of the texts say anything about *why* students ought to learn English or try to motivate the students by mentioning how and where English language skills may be beneficial.

Naturally, all the prefaces express the hope that the students will learn a lot of English in the year to come and that they will enjoy working with the subject. The aim for the course is described in terms of the students' increased ability to speak and write English, but it is worth noticing that none of the prefaces use the notions of communicative competence and appropriate language use in connection with this. In fact, the students' ability to communicate is referred to only indirectly in *Search*, where it is stated that 'Learning a language is not something you can do on your own. It is, therefore, important that you work with other students in your class' (*Search 8, 9, 10*: 3).

The intentions in the English syllabus of developing the students' cultural awareness and their ability to 'communicate across cultural divides', are not followed up in any of the prefaces. The only reference to the need for students to reflect on

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[52] In *Catch 8* there is one additional text in which the authors of the books present themselves (*Catch 8*: 14-15).

cultural differences can be found in *New People, New Places 1,* when the picture material in the books is commented upon:

> Use the pictures in the book! Study them, talk about what you see, discuss similarities and differences between cultures in the English-speaking world and your own culture (*NPNP 1*: 3).[53]

Factual information about English-speaking countries, on the other hand, is given more attention. *New People, New Places*, in particular, points to the central position that cultural information has in the course. The passage below introduces the preface to the book for ninth grade:

> *New People, New Places 2* is a book about the USA. […] You probably know quite a bit about the USA already. But maybe you are not so familiar with the country's history? Many of the texts give you some insight into important events that have happened in the USA. We therefore hope that you will know more when you have finished this book […](*NPNP 2*: 3)[54]

Flight also indicates that an important part of the course is for students to 'learn different things about' countries in the English-speaking world. The prefaces in *Catch* and *Search*, however, convey a different attitude to the cultural material. The authors of *Catch* signal that much work has been done in order to find a content that the students will find interesting and enjoyable. In this textbook series, the motivation effect related to these topics seems to be considered much more important than the knowledge effect, as the excerpts below indicate:

> [The themes] cover all sorts of things from coughing in English to a wander through New Orleans, so be prepared! (*Catch 9*: 2)
> [The themes] cover all sorts of things from love poems to walking in the streets of New York, so be prepared! (*Catch 10*: 2)

In the prefaces to the *Search* series, the authors write primarily about the need for students to reflect on the language learning strategies that work for them. They stress the fact that the material in *Search* only represents suggestions, and that it is up to the students themselves to search for and choose texts and tasks that they find useful. Without referring specifically to any of the topics that the books take up, the authors

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[53] My translation. The *New People, New Places* prefaces are written in Norwegian.
[54] My translation.

then express their rather humble hope that the students will like some of the material that *Search* offers.

It can be concluded that the prefaces send quite different signals about the function and the importance of the cultural material in the books. While *Search* says nothing about the non-linguistic content of the books and *Catch* indicates that topics have been chosen primarily in order to motivate the students, *Flight* and especially *New People, New Places* convey the understanding that it is an obvious objective for the teaching of English to provide the students with knowledge about English-speaking countries. However, neither of these prefaces answers the students' possible questions about *why* they are supposed to work with cultural information. Thus, the divergent references to the cultural material in the prefaces can perhaps be said to reflect the rather unclear signals that the English syllabus sends about the function and the importance that cultural questions have in the teaching and learning of English.

The tables of content provide a bird's-eye view of the content of the textbooks and can therefore be read as indications of what it is that the textbooks aim to do. Here, all textbook series signal that great emphasis is attached to providing students with topics that will appeal to their interests and link up with their own experience. Most of the chapters in all textbook series have headings such as 'Our four-legged friends' (*Flight 8*), 'Food' (*Catch 8*), 'School Life' (*NPNP 2*) and 'Comics and Cartoons' (*Search 8*).

But the tables of content also indicate that encounters with the English-speaking world are seen to constitute an important element in the English course. Each textbook in each series contains one or more headings like 'Cool Britannia' (*NPNP 1*), 'The Land Down Under' (*Search 8*) and 'Going Places – USA' (*Catch 9*). In *Search,* there are also many chapter headings that do not refer specifically to the English-speaking world, but that indicate a desire to contribute to the students' general knowledge about topics such as 'Kings and Queens', 'The Media', 'War and Peace' and 'Heritage'.

Some of the tables of content also list the headings of the texts in each chapter, and it becomes apparent that, in the presentation of foreign countries, a great variety of texts have been chosen. There are many fictional texts, songs, poems and also anecdotes and stories about famous individuals. Other headings signal that the texts

provide factual information about the countries' history and population. Many texts have been given titles that obviously aim to motivate the students for reading, such as 'Toronto calling!' and 'The last British colonies – exciting islands' (*Flight 10*). All in all, the headings of these texts seem to indicate that the cultural material has not been compiled in order to provide the students with substantial information and 'representative' pictures of the foreign countries.[55] Rather, the impression is given that the textbooks aim to provide students with varied and motivating, but rather incidental glimpses of the English-speaking world.

The tables of content in *Catch* provide a very clear message that no great importance is attached to the themes and topics that have been selected and that the linguistic content of the books has top priority. Each chapter is described by way of the skills and the language points that are to be worked with, while the outcome of the chapter is described in terms of the type of text that the students are expected to produce. Knowledge about or insight into questions of context and culture are never mentioned in these descriptions of the desired outcome of the students' work. In the *Flight* workbooks there is also an exclusive focus on the linguistic aspects of the course, as each chapter is presented by way of the areas of grammar, pronunciation and language functions that are covered.

6.1.2 Teacher's guides

As indicated in Table 4.1, there is one teacher's guide for each year level in each textbook series. Each one of these books has introductory notes for the teacher, where the underlying principles for the textbook materials are pointed out and, to some degree, explained. The teacher's guides vary considerably when it comes to how extensive and thorough these explanations are. In the books for eighth grade, for example, *Catch* and *Flight* devote four and six pages respectively to these introductory comments, while *New People, New Places* uses nineteen and *Search* thirty.

There is also great variation in the types of topics that these introductory notes cover. *Flight, Catch* and *New People, New Places* set out primarily to explain the organization of the material and the objectives that are linked to the different types of

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[55] Byram & Morgan's (1994) notion of a representative picture is presented in section 3.2.2.

texts and exercises. The introductory pages also provide some methodological tips, for example about the presentation of a new topic (*Flight 8*) and ways in which pictures can be worked with (*Search 8*).

In three of the textbook series, namely *Flight, New People, New Places* and *Catch,* the teacher's guides do not pay much attention to questions of context and culture and the role that they can play in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. Knowledge about the English-speaking world is presented as an obvious ingredient that needs no further explanation or justification. In *Flight* and *New People, New Places,* the authors refer to 'realia' texts and 'fact-oriented' texts as providing such knowledge (eg *NPNP 1 TG*: 14; *Flight 9 TG*: 5-6). The authors of *Catch* convey a slightly different attitude as they suggest that the aim is not to provide students with factual information, but rather with 'an impression of' English speaking countries:

> It is our opinion that knowledge about the English-speaking world is conveyed best through different types of authentic texts, such as poems, songs, short stories and non-fictional texts. But paintings, photographs etc. can also provide impressions from countries where English is spoken (*Catch TG 9*: 6).

None of these teacher's guides mention intercultural issues and the development of the students' (inter)cultural awareness. Questions related to context awareness and appropriate language use are referred to only in passing, most notably in the description of exercises that involve language functions in *New People, New Places*:

> These expressions contribute to building up the students' ability to vary their language and to use it in a polite and expressive way. […]. The teacher may want to make the students aware that some expressions will be suitable for one person, some for another. The students can also be encouraged to choose their own expressions and to find suitable situations to use them in (*NPNP 1, 2*: 12).[56]

In *Search*, on the other hand, quite an effort has been made to make the new perspectives in the *L-97* English syllabus visible for the teachers and explain the impact that they may have on classroom work. In the teacher's guide for eight grade, for example, the authors devote a whole page to explaining the relationship between language and culture, the way they see it, and they also suggest some approaches to

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[56] All the teacher's guides are written in Norwegian, and the translations are mine.

work with the development of the students' intercultural awareness (*Search TG 8*: 9). A central element in the *Search* teacher's guides is learner autonomy, and the authors argue in much detail for the need to allow students to arrive at their own understandings of the texts through independent work and individual approaches to language learning.

The teacher's guide for tenth grade presents the most explicit and thorough explanation of the function that questions of context and culture can have in the teaching of a foreign language. As a starting point for their argumentation, the authors refer to the goal formulations in *L-97* and also to fact that communicative competence is the primary goal for all foreign language education in Europe. Echoing the Council of Europe documents mentioned in section 2.4.4, they then describe communicative competence in considerable detail under the headings socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and socio-cultural competence (*Search 10 TG*: 6).

As a consequence of their view, the authors of *Search* link the students' knowledge about foreign countries directly to the development of their communication skills and to their attempts to prepare themselves for situations in which members from different cultures meet. Foreign language education needs to provide students with a variety of cultural expressions, they say, and students need to be encouraged to reflect on their own culture so that they can develop intercultural competence and attitudes of tolerance and understanding (*Search 10 TG*: 9 - 10). They emphasize the fact that knowledge about the foreign culture is no goal in itself, but it is a necessary prerequisite in order for students to be able to understand the foreign culture and act according to this understanding (*Search 10 TG*: 9).

In promoting this view, the authors echo Brøgger (1991) who argues that the only valid reason to work with cultural questions in a foreign language course is to link the work closely to the development of the students' language – and culture – skills (see section 3.2.2). This understanding seems to represent a break with the views that the authors of the other textbook series express when it comes to the role that questions of context and culture can play in foreign language education. In fact, it can be argued that *Search* here explains the relationship between language, context and culture that the English syllabus in *L-97* only indicates.

The authors of *Search* argue that the students' cultural competence can be seen, first and foremost, in their ability to interpret, understand and use different texts, and that this ability must be developed through varied work with texts. With reference to Skjelbred's (1992) identification of four different levels in work with texts, they observe that, traditionally, foreign language education has concerned itself only with the two lower levels, ie those that have to do with vocabulary and sentence structure. However, in order to help students develop their communicative ability, the authors argue, there is an obvious need to work with texts at higher levels also, namely those that have to do with the whole text and with the text as an expression of communication.

6.1.3 Summary

The texts under scrutiny in this section convey no common understanding of the role that questions of context and culture ought to have in the teaching of English. All the textbooks include texts and topics that have to do with conditions in English-speaking countries, and some of the introductory texts indicate that knowledge about these countries is a desired outcome of the students' work with English. However, it remains unclear how important this knowledge is, and the textbooks give divergent reasons for including cultural material. Three of the textbook series' introductory texts convey the impression that cultural information is regarded as an obvious ingredient in the course and that it needs no further justification or explanation.

Only the teacher's guides in the *Search* series address the new perspectives that the English syllabus in *L-97* introduces and set out to explain what the formulations about language, context and culture in this document may imply. The teacher's guide for tenth grade, in particular, provides a coherent interpretation of the syllabus' intentions in which the authors link the students' work with questions of context and culture directly to the development of their communication skills.

6.2 Culture-specific reference in prose texts

The investigation of prose texts in terms of their culture-specific reference, ie whether or not it is possible to place them in a specific cultural context, is based on the view that, in trying to make sense of a text, the reader will construct the context in which the

text functions. This will happen, first and foremost, on the basis of the prior knowledge that the reader has of situational and cultural contexts (see section 2.1.1). Thus, a text will be interpreted in terms of the readers' own cultural frames of reference unless the text itself or explanatory comments to the text indicate that other frames of reference apply. In order for foreign language students to be able to explore and learn about new contexts and cultures, it therefore seems imperative that some of the characteristics of these contexts and cultures are made explicit and that they are pointed out to the students (see section 3.1.2).

This, however, does not necessarily mean that *all* textbook texts need to have culture-specific reference. It is also natural that the degree to which and the ways in which different texts refer to specific cultures vary a great deal. While section 6.2.1 presents the ratio of texts with and without culture-specific reference (which is based on a coding of the texts), the following sections therefore go behind the figures presented and describe the prose texts in more detail. Since the importance of culture-specific reference – or the lack of it – seems to vary from one text type to another, I have grouped the texts into six different categories, as described in section 4.4.2.

6.2.1 The ratio of prose texts with and without culture-specific reference

The prose texts have been coded according to the procedures described in Chapter 4. Texts that refer to and / or can be placed within a specific cultural context have been coded as having culture-specific reference, while texts that refer to unidentifiable – and seemingly culture-neutral - contexts are coded as having no culture-specific reference.

Table 6.1: The ratio of prose text lines in the four textbook series with and without culture-specific reference, in percent [57]

CULTURE REFERENCE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	AVERAGE
With culture-specific reference	.71	.88	.86	.84	.82
Without culture-specific ref.	.29	.12	.14	.16	.18
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6.1 shows that all the textbook series have relatively few texts without culture-specific reference. *New People, New Places* has the lowest percentage of such texts, 12

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[57] The numerical data that these figures are based on are provided in the appendix.

percent, while *Search* and *Catch* follow closely with 14 and 16 percent. *Flight,* on the other hand, has a much higher proportion of texts without culture-specific reference, 29 percent.

Naturally, there is great variation among the texts that have been coded as having culture-specific reference. While some texts present aspects of foreign countries and cultures in a direct and explicit way, other texts provide much less conspicuous references. There are also great differences in the introductions and the commentaries to the texts and the degree to which they point out cultural references (see section 6.3). Sometimes, close scrutiny is needed in order to find out where a text stems from or which country or culture it refers to.

Place names and the names of famous people and events are obvious clues. Some texts have been coded as having culture-specific reference because of information provided in the teacher's guide about the author or the origin of a text. Other texts have been coded on the basis of culture-specific terminology. If the term 'A-levels' is used in a text, for example, it has been coded as having to do with the United Kingdom (eg *Flight 10 TG*: 154-155). In other words, whenever a clue has been found that makes it possible to place a text in a specific country or culture, it has been coded among the ones with culture-specific reference.

This means that many more texts than those indicated in Table 6.1 (18 % on average) may come across to the readers as referring to a culture-neutral context. It should also be noted that, even if a text provides references to a country other than Norway, this is no guarantee that students will recognize it as an encounter with a foreign cultural context. As indicated in earlier research on textbooks, a text that includes 'foreign' place names and personal names may still, essentially, reflect the students' own cultural background (see section 2.4.6).

In today's textbooks, this is the case, in particular, in texts that deal with general human concerns and conditions. Most of them aim, apparently, to link up with the students' own interests and experience, and typical topics are leisure activities, friends and relationships. The youngsters portrayed have dogs as pets, they listen to American rock music, they seem to have plenty of time and money to go to the movies, and they have parents who embarrass them. Despite the use of English personal names and

place names, the primary concern of many of these texts is, probably, to describe situations that Norwegian students will recognize as their own. In this way, the textbooks can be said to convey pictures of seemingly 'culture-neutral', yet clearly Western contexts (eg *Flight 10*: 130-131; *Flight 8*: 30-31; *Search 8*: 169).

It is, of course, natural for a textbook to try to present topics and contexts that the students will see as relevant to their own situation. But, as already mentioned, the tendency to promote the understanding that Western contexts and Western ways of looking at the world are universally valid is rather problematic. In addition to the imperialistic overtones that such an approach may have, it also reduces the students' opportunities to learn about foreign contexts and cultures. It can also be said to disregard the fact that the students' own cultural backgrounds and frames of reference may be quite diverse.

6.2.2 Information-focused texts

Most of the information-focused texts in the textbook series present information about countries in the English-speaking world and make very clear references to the country that they set out to inform the students about.[58] In some texts, however, a specific cultural context seems to be implied, but it is not brought to the readers' attention. This can be seen in the example below:

> **Christmas traditions**
> A How many questions can you answer before you read the texts about Christmas traditions?
> 1 Do you know what Christmas crackers are?
> 2 What is special about mistletoe?
> 3 Do you know the English names for typical Christmas greenery (not trees)?
> 4 When do you think the first Christmas card was sent?
> 5 When was the Christmas tree tradition brought to England? […]
>
> B Now read about the various Christmas traditions and check your answers:
> **Deck the halls**
> People usually decorate their homes with greenery for Christmas.[…](*Catch 9*: 76).

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[58] These texts are discussed in more detail in section 7.2, which focuses on the non-fictional texts' presentation of foreign countries and cultures.

As the learner answers the questions and starts reading, it will become clear that the reference is to a British context, that 'Christmas traditions' really means 'Christmas traditions in Britain', and that 'people' in the first sentence of the text for reading refers to British, or English, people.

A similar example can be seen in a text in *Flight* that describes traditional ways of foretelling one's future love life. No indication is given in the heading or in the introduction to the text about the cultural frames of reference, but in the middle of the second page of the text one understands that the authors probably have a British context in mind:

> **Love, oh love**!
> The language of love can be extremely complicated, but see if that stops us from being occupied with the subject! Love letters, hearts carved on trees, names on the inside of a rough book, shy looks and whispered secrets – you name it, they are all part of the eternal dream of true and everlasting love.
> […] Churchyards were often involved in love predictions – if you were brave enough to visit one at the stroke of midnight, and certain days of the year were better than others. On 24 April you cold hope for help from St Mark, or you could wait for Midsummer Eve, St John the Baptist's Day. Halloween, Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day were also closely linked to well-known ways of foretelling your own future […] (*Flight 10*: 15-16).

When textbook authors do not indicate which country a text refers to, but instead establish a British cultural context only by implication, this may convey the impression that they consider the reference to the United Kingdom in an English language textbook to be obvious. There seem to be several problems with such an approach. First of all, what seems obvious to the authors may not seem equally obvious to the students, and the text may therefore come across as more difficult for the students to understand than the authors had intended.

Secondly, by not making the references to a particular culture explicit, the students' opportunities to explore and learn about foreign cultures and other discourse communities are, obviously, reduced. Last, but not least, it can be argued that the tradition of placing the United Kingdom at the heart of an English course has lost its relevance in an age when students meet English and need English in contacts with a variety of different cultures around the world.

Most of the information-focused texts that provide no culture-specific reference have to do with general topics such as 'inventors and their ideas' (*Flight 8*: 112-113) and UFOs (*Search 10*: 126-127). Some texts follow up or explain an issue that is dealt with in a fictional text. The example below is a part of a text that accompanies an excerpt from Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole*:

> **Tonsillitis**
> If you have a sore throat that keeps coming back again and again, it may be because you have tonsillitis. The tonsils' job is to produce chemicals that fight infection in the throat, but sometimes they can become infected themselves […] (*Catch 9*: 143)

There are also quite a few texts without culture-specific reference that deal with contemporary, global issues. Most of these texts are in the books for tenth grade, which is a clear response to the call in *L-97* for students at this level to work with topical, international questions. *Search* takes up more such issues than the other textbook series do and *Search 10*, for example, devotes a whole chapter to questions of war and peace, while another chapter discusses environmental and cultural protection.

Many topics have apparently been chosen in order to appeal to the students' interests and their own experience and to motivate them for language learning. Thus, animals, sports and various forms of entertainment are dealt with in a number of texts. The following is taken from 'A mini-history of cats':

> We don't know for sure when the cat was domesticated, but it probably happened when people went from being hunters, who moved around from place to place, to becoming farmers living in one place their whole lives. People would then find it useful to have an animal to help them get rid of mice and rats in their houses and barns […] (*Flight 8*: 38).

In texts such as these, whenever general information is provided or global issues are dealt with, there is, perhaps, no reason to call for culture-specific reference. Certain topics can, clearly, be treated without relating them to any specific context or situation. But at the same time, one could always be aware of the danger that generally Western ways of understanding a topic or an issue are presented as being universally valid. The text above about cats, for example, has obviously been written in order to fit in with the Western teenager's understanding of notions such as 'people', 'farmers', 'houses' and 'barns'. While this may be a natural thing to do, an alternative text could have

contributed more to the students' culture learning if it had placed the cat in a specific cultural context and perhaps even presented it in terms of different cultures' relationship to and understanding of the animal.

Thus, it may be worth remembering that most topics can be dealt with in ways that will open for students' work with questions of context and culture, if they are related to specific situations or people. One example of such a text is 'Save our planet', where three American high school students are interviewed about a school project (*Flight 10*: 113- 114). This text provides the students with much information both about global and local challenges when it comes to environmental protection. But the text gives the readers some insight into American classroom procedures as well and it also gives them an impression of the ways in which three American teenagers think – and talk about such issues.

6.2.3 Fictional texts and other 'authentic' texts

A large number of the fictional texts are taken from British and American literary canon, and extensive information is provided about their authors. Many other fictional texts are also easy to place in a specific cultural context, either because of references in the texts themselves or because of the extra information that is attached to them. These texts will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

Some of the fictional texts that do not refer to any specific cultural context are science fiction texts and ghost stories, as all the textbook series include at least one text that has to do with supernatural phenomena or with life in the quite distant future. Since the whole point of such texts is to describe situations and events beyond our usual experience it is, of course, only natural that they do not reflect any specific context in the real world.

But the fact that quite a few of the other fictional texts are difficult, or even impossible, to place in a specific cultural context, seems more problematic.[59] One example is the text 'The Choice is Yours' (*New People, New Places 1*: 162-171), which tells the story of a girl who is expected to be at choir rehearsal and hockey

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[59] It should be noted that some of the texts discussed here have been coded as having culture-specific reference, since clues in the texts have made it possible to place them in a specific cultural context. However, this does not necessarily mean that the culture-specific reference will be apparent to the students.

practice – at the same time. The informed reader might be able to place the text on the basis of references to 'head girl' and 'hockey team', but it is more doubtful that the average student in a Norwegian classroom will recognize these words as indicating any specific cultural context. The teacher's guide does little to draw the teacher's and the students' attention to the texts' potential for cultural learning. Rather, it contributes to the impression that the text is set in a 'generally Western' universe by indicating that it has do so with a 'situation and a conflict which many students probably recognize' (*NPNP 1* TG: 46).

The text 'Raymond's run' by Toni Cade Bambara in *New People, New Places 2* represents a similar problem. No information is given that the author is African-American, and the occasional references in the text to Harlem, New York, are not pointed out. Unfortunately, the cultural context of the story has not been identified even for the book's illustrator, so the drawings that accompany the text show white people with blond hair. Such a slip certainly does not help students discover the opportunities that the text may provide to encounter and learn about African-American culture.

Some of the texts with only vague culture-specific reference illustrate the relationship between generations, eg 'Treasure, the Trials of a Teenage Terror' (*Search 8*: 170-171), 'The Granny Project' (*Search 10*: 48-50) and 'The pearl ring' (*Flight 8*: 137-143). Other texts describe problems that some teenagers face, such as eating disorders, coping with a physical handicap or, more commonly, waiting for the phone to ring (eg *Flight 10*: 133- 136; *Catch 9*: 63-64; *Catch* 9: 108-109; *Catch 10*: 134- 138). Although English names are used for both people and places, these texts can be said to reflect a 'generally Western' universe which, obviously, students are expected to recognize and be able to identify themselves with.

When a text provides only vague culture-specific reference, one could wish for extra information about the context to be provided in introductions or commentaries to the texts. In the case of the texts mentioned above, the students' attention could, for example, be drawn to the fact that the relationship between generations or a teenager's perceived problems may differ greatly from one cultural community to another. Such additional information and commentaries could, clearly, add to the texts' information

value and also help open the students' eyes to possible similarities and differences between their own experience and the one depicted in the text.

In accordance with the *L-97* requirements, the four textbook series include a large number of 'authentic' texts that have been taken from different newspapers, magazines or other publications. Since such texts are recommended and selected exactly because they serve a purpose in the world outside the classroom, it seems strange that very little is made of their origin and few, if any, attempts are made to create a link between the learners and the texts' original readers. Among the texts for extra reading in the *Flight* workbooks, for example, there are many texts that seem to be taken from different magazines for teenagers, but information is provided neither about the cultural background of the readers nor about the status and the popularity of the publication.

As indicated in section 6.1.2, the *Catch* teacher's guides expect students to experience and learn about the foreign culture simply by reading 'authentic' texts and many texts in all the textbook series seem to be included in the hope that this will happen. Below is part of a text for reading that is presented without any commentaries or exercises attached to it:

> Clique out!
> School's only been back a nano-second and already it's started –
> Cliquesville! Everyone's joining one! It's like a survival course in some
> schools, but once you're in a clique, it can be kinda difficult to make new
> friends. This is a sad state of affairs, right? Surely you should be able to
> hang with whom you please? Make a stand and follow these five tips for
> a clique-free life:
> Don't fall for it. If you make allegiances, it's like making a promise to
> only ever hang out with the same ol' group […] (*Flight 10*: 13)

Although this text does provide some insight into an English-speaking teenager's thoughts and his or her ways of expressing them, it seems obvious that much more learning could have resulted from this text if information had been provided about the speaker's background and about the context of the text. Exercises that focus on some of the words and phrases that the speaker uses could also, clearly, have added to the texts' information value.

The textbooks include other types of 'authentic' texts as well. *Catch*, for example, uses both tickets and excerpts from authentic information pamphlets in the presentation of tourist destinations around the world. Although such texts have great potential in themselves when it comes to providing students with believable pictures of culture-specific contexts, it seems obvious that the learning effect will increase if the information that they provide is pointed out and explained in commentaries to the texts and followed up and worked with in the exercise material. *Catch* provides an example of how this can be done. Attached to a photograph of a sign on an Australian beach that tells tourists to beware of marine stingers, one can find additional information about the animals and the danger that they represent as well as an exercise that follows up this information (*Catch 10*: 202).

6.2.4 Fairy tales and fables

Fairy tales, myths and legends are well represented in all textbook series, and their purpose seems to be twofold. On the one hand, many tales and legends appear to have been included in order to provide the readers with some insight into a particular culture's heritage. On the other hand, many fairy tales have probably been selected in order to provide students with motivating and relatively easily accessible texts. One explanation why so many texts of this sort have been included can also be found in the *L-97* English syllabus, which suggests the use of tales and legends for years eight and nine (*C-99*: 244-245).

When it comes to providing students with insight into a particular culture, all textbook series emphasize the Native American tradition (*Flight 9*: 26-27; *Flight 10*: 75; *NPNP 2 TG*: 85-86; *Search 9*: 146-148; *Search 9 TG*: 80; *Catch 9 TG*: 133; *Catch 9*: 196-197). But myths and tales from Australian Aboriginal culture and from the New Zealand Maoris have been included as well (*Flight 10*: 96-97; *Search 8*: 188-189; *Catch 9*: 185-186; *Flight 10*: 88; *Catch 9*: 190-191). All these texts are identified and commented upon as an expression of the specific culture to which they belong.

The textbooks also present many tales and legends from the Anglo-Saxon folk tradition, such as the legends about Robin Hood and King Arthur and the Irish tale about 'The Leprachauns and the Shoemaker' (*Search 8*: 77-80; *Catch 8*: 41-42; *NPNP 3 TG*: 66-67; *Flight 8 WB*: 119-120; *Search 9*: 36-39; *Search 9*: 122-123). In 'The

Fairy folk' readers are introduced to the different characters that one can meet in fairy tales. However, only occasional references to place names inform the reader that the description of fairies, bogeymen, elementals and gnomes refer to characters that appear in *British* folk tales (*Flight 8*: 92-95). As in the case of some of the information-focused texts, the cultural reference becomes apparent only after having read through a good part of the text (see section 6.2.2).

There seems to be a tendency in the textbooks not to focus on and point out the origin of texts that stem from a European tradition. Either the reference is only implied, as in the text about 'The fairy folk' in *Flight*, or the texts are presented as if they belong to the readers' and the English-speaking world's common cultural heritage. This is the case, for example, in the presentation of excerpts from different fairy tales in *Catch.* Here, students meet stories that are well known in Norway (eg Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and The Three Bears) as well as stories that are less known among Norwegians (eg Tom Thumb and Jack and the Beanstalk). No information is provided about the origin of the different fairy tales, about their popularity in different communities or about the fact that many of them appear, in slightly different versions, in a number of different cultures (*Catch 8*: 34-41).

In the presentation of texts from different folk traditions, then, one can see a tendency to focus on them as an expression of culture primarily when they belong to indigenous peoples on remote continents. While all of these texts have been identified and commented on, many of the texts that fall into a European tradition appear without any explanatory comments (eg 'The Fir Tree Who Wanted Leaves' (*Catch 8 TG*: 23) and 'The Princess who stood her own two feet' (*Catch 9*: 129-138)). Such an approach could, perhaps, signal to the students that 'culture' is something that belongs to 'exotic' peoples in far away places, and that there is no need to turn one's attention to one's own culture and explore the diversity of meanings that can be found in more familiar cultural expressions.

6.2.5 Jokes and anecdotes

Jokes are unevenly distributed in the four textbook series. While three of the series hardly contain any jokes at all, *Flight* includes a large amount of them. There are two full pages of jokes in each textbook, in addition to a total of 43 jokes in the margins,

next to the main texts for reading. The great majority of these jokes do not refer to any specific cultural context.

The jokes are clearly intended to add humor to the language learning situation and to give students 'comic relief' from the more serious issues that are dealt with in the other texts. Also, along with a number of riddles, sayings and proverbs that are included in the margins, the jokes present language in a manageable and enjoyable format.

Often, the jokes link up with the topic of the text, and many of them undoubtedly add a welcome, humorous perspective to the topic in question. But the constant use of jokes may also seem contrived, and perhaps signal to the learners that the subject matter presented in the texts is not very important. One rather disturbing example of this is when the following jokes are presented in the margin next to a text about a young girl with eating disorders:

- Doctor! Doctor! I think I am a dustbin!
- What rubbish!

- Doctor! Doctor! I think I'm a bumble-bee!
- Oh, buzz off!

- Doctor! Doctor! I think I'm a bridge!
- Now, what's come over you?
- Two cars and a bus! (*Flight 10*: 135).

Flight also makes extensive use of anecdotes and stories with an entertaining twist to them. There are quite a few such texts in the *Flight* textbooks, but even more among the texts for extra reading in the workbooks. Headings such as 'Mrs. Field's parrot', 'The policeman and the thief' and 'A bright boy' indicate that most of them deal with everyday situations (*Flight 8 WB*: 49-50; ibid: 169-170; *Flight 9 WB*: 19). However, many of the situations cannot be placed in any specific cultural context, and they certainly do not seem to aim to provide students with realistic information about life in the foreign country. This is one of the shorter texts:

A patient cinema guest
There was a long queue outside the cinema. A man had been waiting very patiently in line, and he finally reached the box office. He got his ticket, paid for it and went to the entrance door. Not long after, he was back in the queue again, waited, bought a ticket and walked to the door.

The same thing happened: he was soon at the back of the queue again. This went on a couple of times more, until the cashier got curious and asked him why he came back to buy a new ticket all the time. "I'll tell you," the man said, "you see, every time I try to pass that door, a person takes my ticket and tears it up!" (*Flight 9 WB*: 93)

These anecdotes and stories in *Flight* echo a text type that was common in the earliest generation of textbooks for the teaching of English in Norway. Brekke's *Lærebog i engelsk for begyndere*, for example, which was the most widely used textbook for the teaching of English in Norway from its publication in 1887 throughout the first half of the 20th century, contained a large number of such texts (Lund 2002). None of the other textbook series have followed up this tradition.

While most of the jokes and anecdotes do not refer to specific cultural contexts, the textbook series also provide examples of ways in which such short, entertaining texts can be linked up with the cultural content of the chapter that they are in. In the chapter in *Search* that deals with 'Britain – in all directions', for example, the jokes that have been included provide valuable extra information. Some jokes present popular stereotypes, while others provide students with an impression of the traditional rivalry among people on the British Isles:

A jumbo jet is in difficulties, and among the passengers are an Irishman, a Scotsman, an Englishman and a Welshman. The captain announces that they are losing height and that one of the passengers will have to jump out.
'I do this for the glory of Ireland,' says the Irishman and jumps out.
'We need to lose more weight,' says the captain.
So the Scotsman shouts, 'I do this for the glory of Scotland,' and jumps out. 'Sorry,' says the captain, 'I'm afraid we need to lose the weight of just one more person.'
'I do this for the glory of Wales,' says the Welshman and throws the Englishman out (*Search 10 TG*: 93).

Search also uses jokes in connection with work that addresses the students' own stereotypes, as will be shown in section 9.3.1.

6.2.6 Textbook dialogues

Questions can be raised about the degree to which it is possible, in a foreign language textbook, to present believable dialogues and examples of 'real' language use. While real-life dialogue merely complements the knowledge of context that the interlocutors

share, textbook dialogues often need to provide information about the context to a degree that makes them seem redundant, unrealistic and contrived (Widdowson 1998a).[60] Also, since the language used in different discourse communities varies to such a great extent, and since conventions of language use are in constant change, it will always be difficult to provide examples of spoken language that will appear to be true-to-life.

In *Search*, the authors say this about the challenges of providing the students with good models for oral language use:

> Many authentic oral texts are linked to situations and are created at the spur of the moment. They are situated in time and place and are no longer authentic if they are removed from the context in which they were made. Also, we can hardly imagine that it is possible to record spontaneous dialogues with good sound quality. The recorded dialogue or discussion must be practiced if it is to be used in a textbook. Therefore, students rarely have good authentic models for oral genres beyond what goes on in the classroom (*Search 10 TG*: 15).[61]

As a consequence of their view, the authors of *Search* have included dialogues in their textbook series only as parts of fictional texts. This may seem to be a natural consequence if one wants to provide students with examples of believable dialogue in culture-specific contexts.

But *Search* could definitely have done more to point out and make use of the information related to questions of context and culture that the dialogues in the fictional texts provide. An excerpt from a play which is presented as a text for listening can exemplify this. The authors say that the main intention with the text is to serve as a model for the students' own role plays (*Search 8 TG*: 99):

MOTHER	David! It's eight o'clock. Are you coming down or aren't you? David!
DAVID	(*Upstairs*) All right!
MOTHER	No 'all right' about it! Do you hear me!
DAVID	(*Low*) Keep your hair on.
MOTHER	(*Going up a couple of steps*) What did you say?
DAVID	I'm combing my hair down.
MOTHER	We'll have less of your lip, my lad […] (*Search 8 TG*: 100)

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[60] See section 3.5.1 for further discussion of this point.
[61] My translation; see note 56 in section 6.1.2.

The conversation is introduced as one 'which takes place in an ordinary family on a weekday morning', thus indicating that such situations are identical in most families around the world. If background information had been provided about the play and the context in which it takes place, this impression might have been avoided. Moreover, if the students' attention had been drawn to different aspects of the situation described and the language that the interlocutors choose to use in it, the text would probably have increased its value as a starting point for the students' own language use.

The other textbook series include quite a few dialogues among the texts for reading and listening and especially *New People, New Places* makes extensive use of dialogues. Here, almost every chapter is introduced by one, and there are also many dialogues among the texts for listening and as introductions to the exercise material. Many of these have obviously been included in order to provide the students with examples of language that can be used in situations that may be relevant for them:

At the box office

Sally	Two for *I was a Teenage Werewolf,* please.
Box office lady	Sorry, completely sold out.
Sally	What about the nine o'clock show?
Box office lady	Only a few seats left, I'm afraid. Here we've got two in the same row, but on opposite sides of the aisle.
Chris	That's all right. Do you have a youth discount?
Box office lady	How old are you?
Chris	Sixteen.
Box office lady	Sorry, then you can't see the film anyway (*NPNP 2*: 155).

Mary	What's that you're looking at?
Sam	The super duper horoscope. Let's see what it says about you.
Mary	Come off it! That's just a lot of rubbish.
Sam	Oh, come on. Your birthday's the 24th of August, right?
Mary	Right.
Sam	That makes you a Virgo (*NPNP 3 TG*: 63).

Although it can be claimed that dialogues such as these are unrealistic they can, of course, be useful in the way that they provide learners with examples of vocabulary, structures and certain traits of spoken language. While the first example shows some of the politeness phrases commonly used in English, such as 'please', 'sorry' and 'I'm

afraid', the second example presents some phrases that can be used in an informal argument.

The authors say in the teacher's guides that the intention with the many dialogues that are used in *New People, New Places* is to provide students with a sort of 'core language' that can be used in similar situations. Thus, these dialogues can, perhaps, be said to represent the type of 'culture-free' English that was described in section 2.2.2. But, as indicated there, the notion of 'culture-free' language teaching is a problematic one, not least because it can obscure the fact that language use is always embedded in a particular context and that it varies considerably from one situation to another.

This problem can, however, be solved quite easily, if the students are made aware of the limitations that the presentation of such 'core' language represents. The dialogues can be worked with and discussed in relation to different contextual factors, and the language that they present can thus be given relevant, culture-specific meaning. Kramsch's (1993) notion of 'expanding the context', which was mentioned in section 3.3.3, can be a key word here.

In connection with the dialogues on the previous page, students could, for example, be informed about the fact that words such as 'movie theatre' and 'box office' in the first dialogue may be more common in some countries than in others. In connection with the second dialogue, questions of appropriacy could be focused on, as it is quite important for language learners to understand that phrases like 'Come off it' and 'That's just a lot of rubbish' may be acceptable in some informal encounters between teenagers, but that they could be quite inappropriate in other situations.

Many dialogues are presented as an introduction to work with language functions. In *New People, New Places* 2, students are told that the following language is useful in situations when one asks someone out:

> 'How about coming for a walk in the park, Chuck?'
> 'OK, Marie.'
>
> 'Do you feel like coming for a coke or something before you go home, Liza?'
> 'Sorry, Andy. I've promised to get something from the mall for my Mom.'

'Do you fancy going to the movie theatre some night, Judy? Wednesday, maybe?'
'Yes, I'd love to. Thanks, Graham' (*NPNP 2*: 108).

After having read these dialogues, students are asked to make up dialogues in which they invite each other to do different things and accept or turn down the invitation, using the phrases that the dialogues exemplify. Students are also made aware of the fact that, in order to be polite, they should use the name of the person they are talking to and always remember to say thanks.

Other aspects of the participants' choice of language are not pointed out to the students, but it seems clear that dialogues such as these can lend themselves to the exploration of many aspects of context-specific behaviour. The level of formality is only one issue.[62] From the first verbal exchange we learn that Marie and Chuck are in a situation where it is natural for a girl to ask a boy to go for a walk in the park. Rather than pretending that this is an equally normal situation in all cultures, this particular scene could give rise to a discussion about different practices in different communities. For Norwegian learners of English, it might certainly be useful to reflect on the fact that Norwegian understandings of sex roles are not very common in many other parts of the world.

One explanation why the textbooks do not focus on questions of context and culture in connection with the presentation of dialogues might lie in the view that students at this level need only to be taught basic, 'survival' English and that considerations such as the ones above should be reserved for students at a higher level of proficiency (Byram 1989). This view seems to be based on the understanding that questions of context and culture are, somehow, more difficult to grasp than many of the other aspects of language that a language learner necessarily has to cope with.

Such an argument is valid in the way that one cannot, of course, expect to be able to 'teach' an infinite number of contextual factors in the same way as items of vocabulary and grammar points have been taught in the past. It is also, clearly, important to avoid providing so many examples of linguistic diversity and different

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[62] This point will be followed up in section 8.2.3.

conventions of language use that foreign language learning comes to be seen as an impossible task.

However, there seems to be no reason to obscure the role that context plays in communication situations. Even at lower levels, it is possible to make texts the focus of attention in the classroom and, in them, investigate what people actually say and do with the language. The ethnographic approach suggested in section 3.2.2 could be central here. Moreover, since most Norwegian students are exposed to many varieties of English outside the classroom, they will probably find work with differences in vocabulary, levels of formality and conventions of linguistic behavior both relevant and motivating.

6.2.7 Monologues and interviews

The textbooks include quite a few monologues and interviews that are difficult – or impossible - to place in any specific cultural context. In *New People, New Places*, many brief monologues are used as texts for listening comprehension, and students are, for example, asked to find out what different people are afraid of or which sport they are talking about (eg *NPNP 1 TG*: 58; *NPNP 2 TG*: 68). Because of the brevity of these texts and the nature of the exercises that are attached to them, it may seem natural that no culture-specific information is provided.

Other texts are much longer, and many of them are presented in the form of a letter to an agony column or a diary entry. The majority of these are typical examples of texts that refer to unidentifiable contexts and that, clearly, aim to link up with the students' own experiences (eg 'That's life!' *Flight 8*: 23-25; 'From Jim's diary' *Flight 8*: 30-31; 'What is friendship all about?' *Flight 10*: 9-11). The textbooks also present interviews with different people who tell us about their jobs, but no information is provided as to where in the world these people live and work (eg *Catch 10 TG*: 74; *Flight 10*: 150–153).

These texts can, of course, provide students with much valuable linguistic input. Also, as is done in *Catch*, the texts can be used to exemplify the interview genre (*Catch 10*: 116). Still, there seems to be no reason to place texts such as these in seemingly culture-neutral situations. Diary entries, letters and interviews which provide substantial, personal information about individual people, but fail to include

information about the persons' cultural background, certainly seem to represent missed opportunities when it comes to answering Risager's (1991) call for foreign language education to provide students with encounters with 'real' representatives of specific cultural contexts.[63]

Some texts have only an implied reference to the United Kingdom. In the introduction to a series of monologues in *Catch* where students talk about their feelings about school, readers are told that 'the holidays are over and it's back into uniform for these children' (*Catch 8*: 8). In an interview in *Flight,* some youngsters who are asked about their career plans make sporadic references to their 'A-levels', while the judo player Clare Sharman, in another interview, mentions that she used to travel 'up to Scotland' (*Flight 10 TG*: 154-155; *Catch 10*: 115). This strategy seems to correspond to the one described in connection with information-focused texts and fairy tales and fables, where it is tacitly understood that English language teaching and English language use belong, first and foremost, in British cultural contexts. As argued in section 6.2.2, such an approach can be said to be problematic for several reasons.

Some texts exemplify a different problem. Here, learners are given substantial amounts of cultural information, but it is presented in situations of language use that seem highly unrealistic, and learners are given compilations of facts rather than examples of normal, spoken language. 'A chat in a Dublin café', for example, consists primarily of a survey of Irish history, presented as a monologue by an old Irish lady (*Flight 8*: 154-155).

Many of the texts that present factual information by way of rather contrived language are interviews that are used for listening comprehension. It can, of course, be argued that comprehension questions related to easily identifiable pieces of information can help students focus their listening. But it can also be considered a weakness that the textbooks include so few texts that show 'real people' in 'real' situations of language use, since this reduces the students' opportunities to learn about the interactional function of language, ie the ways in which language is used in order to establish and maintain relationships between people.[64]

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[63] Risager's (1991) point is discussed in sections 2.4.6 and 3.2.2.
[64] The notions of the 'transactional' and the 'interactional' functions of language are presented in section 3.3.3.

6.3 References to questions of context and culture in introductions, commentaries and exercise material

The introductions and commentaries to the texts and the exercises that are attached to them obviously have an important role to play when it comes to drawing the students' attention to culture-specific contexts and other aspects of context and culture in the text. On the other hand, if they focus primarily on linguistic aspects of the texts or follow up the content of the texts only in general terms, they may indicate to the students that questions of context and culture are not very important in a foreign language course. Some aspects of these questions have already been dealt with, but this section looks in more detail at the different functions that introductions, commentaries and exercises may have.

6.3.1 Introductions and commentaries

The four textbook series vary considerably when it comes to the use of introductions and commentaries to the texts. A large number of texts are presented without any introduction at all, or only with initial instructions as to how students are expected to work with the text. Other texts are introduced by way of comments that appear to aim to motivate the students for the work that lies ahead of them and to facilitate their reading. One common approach is to appeal to the students' curiosity. A text about the Tower of London, for example, is introduced like this: 'Do you believe in ghosts? Would you like to meet one?' (*Flight 10 TB*: 32).

There are also many attempts to establish a link with the students' own experience. The example below shows the introduction to a text about King Henry VIII:

> We may think that there are many royal scandals today, at least if we are to believe everything written in magazines and newspapers. But royal scandals are nothing new. What do you think of the following? (Search 9: 41)

Many of the questions and exercises that follow the texts also make a point of linking up with the students' own experience. Especially in connection with texts that deal with teenage issues, there is a tendency in the exercise material to focus on the things that the people presented in the text and the students may have in common. This may, of course, be a wise thing to do in order to help students relate to the textbook materials. At the same time, it seems a pity that, in many cases, neither introductions

nor exercises draw the students' attention to the information about foreign people and cultures that the texts provide.

In connection with texts that are difficult to place in a specific cultural context, introductions and commentaries can have a particularly important role to play. If they provide extra information about the where and the when of a text, introductions and commentaries can, clearly, add much to the value of the text as a starting point for the students' work with questions of context and culture. While it must be concluded that today's textbooks do so to a very limited degree, some examples can be given of introductions and commentaries that exploit this opportunity.

One text in *Flight* consists of four monologues by four young people who talk about their money spending habits. The youngsters have English names but could, from what they tell us, come from any upper-middle class background in the Western world. The introduction to the texts, however, places the teenagers in the United States and also provides a characterization of American society that the readers can reflect on:

> **No mon', no fun?**
> In America, they say that "Money makes the world go round", and it certainly seems that having a lot of money is important if you live in the USA. Many people think expensive clothes, cars, houses and vacations are necessary if you want to "keep up" with the rest. What about teenagers – are they big moneyspenders too? Is it possible to have a good time without spending a fortune? We have asked four American teenagers what they do in their spare time and how much they spend (*Flight 9*: 12).

The passage below introduces a conversation between three teenagers which, in itself, provides very few culture-specific references:

> Cheryl, Myra and Jim are classmates and good friends. They live in Boston, Massachusetts. Cheryl and Jim are fifteen and Myra is sixteen. They have the day off from school because it's St Patrick's Day. They all go to a Catholic school where many of the students are Irish American. At the moment they are sitting in a deli, having lunch (NPNP 2: 98).

With the help of this introduction, then, it becomes possible to place the teenagers' everyday conversation in a specific context, and both the things they talk about and the

ways in which the teenagers address each other can be explored in terms of a richer meaning potential.

In connection with this text, extra information is also provided about St. Patrick's Day and the ways in which many Irish Americans celebrate it, accompanied by a picture of two people who are dressed up in green. The juxtaposition of an information-focused text, a text that presents 'real people' and close-up photographs of the people involved can probably be said to illustrate a useful format when it comes to providing students with encounters with and information about foreign contexts and cultures that provides new knowledge at the same time as it appeals to the students' personal involvement.

A large part of the introductions and commentaries that deal with cultural issues do so by way of biographical information about the author of the text, as most of the well-known authors are identified and presented. Different approaches are used. In *Flight*, at least half a page is devoted to the best-known authors, such as Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift and John Steinbeck (*Flight 8*: 78; *Flight 8*: 158; *Flight 9*: 129). The other textbooks usually present the author in a short text in the margin, and there is also often a picture of him or her.[65]

Most of the biographical information that is provided is related to authors who represent British and American literary canon. However, it could be argued that, for students, information about the authors of teenage literature might be just as interesting. One text in *Catch 10*, for example, has been written by a person who calls himself 'Avi'. In the teacher's guide, extensive information is provided about the other books that Avi has written, what his main intentions with his books are and, not least, about the fact that he is an award-winning author who is very popular among American youngsters. Such information will probably help Norwegian students place the text in its proper context and thus add both to their understanding and their appreciation of it.

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[65] In *New People, New Places* the presentation of authors is somewhat inconsistent, as some of the authors are identified only in the acknowledgments in the back of the textbook. This applies to Toni Cade Bambara, Paula Danziger, Susan Hinton, Myron Levoy, Joan Lingard and A. Rutgers van der Loeff (all in *NPNP 2*). The author of the South African text 'The Accomplice' in *NPNP 3* is not identified at all.

Most of the introductions and commentaries that draw the students' attention to aspects of context or culture in a text are attached to texts that, in themselves, have clear culture-specific reference. As the examples below show, some introductions provide extra background information about the topic that the following text deals with, while other introductions set the scene for an excerpt from a literary work:

> **A Letter From America**
> In the 1880s thousands of Norwegians emigrated to America to escape the poverty at home. The Thoresen family were among them. Now 16 year old Mathilde Thoresen writes to her best friend Siv describing her new life (*NPNP 2*: 134).
>
> **Under the Hawthorn Tree**
> This text is the first chapter of a novel written by the Irish author Marita Conlon-McKenna. *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is about three children and how they survive during what is called The Great Irish Famine in the 1840s (*Search 9*: 124).

Clearly, introductions like these help students to a head start when it comes to understanding the text that they are going to read. But these introductions - and the main texts that they introduce – also draw the students' attention to the story that is being told and emphasize the importance of the cultural content of the texts.

6.3.2 Questions and exercises

It has been established that the large majority of texts in the textbooks have culture-specific reference and, as will be shown in later chapters, the textbooks provide a considerable amount of information about and opportunities for encounters with different cultures and contexts. The questions and exercises, on the other hand, could have contributed much more when it comes to drawing the students' attention to the wealth of learning and experience related to questions of context and culture that the texts open for.

There seem to be different reasons for this situation. One reason lies in the fact that the great majority of exercises focus only on linguistic aspects of the texts. Another reason can be found in the diffuse objectives that seem to be related to the cultural material. As will be discussed in more detail below, the questions and exercises contribute to a situation where quite different signals are being sent as to what the intentions with the cultural material are. Finally, as indicated in the previous

section, one reason can be seen in the tendency to encourage students to discuss the issues that the texts take up only in terms of their own experience with them. Questions and exercises that challenge the students to look at and try to understand the world in new and alternative ways are relatively rare.

It comes, of course, as no surprise that a foreign language textbook includes many exercises that focus on linguistic items and on the development of the students' practical language skills. What does seem surprising, however, it that the textbooks include so much cultural information and so many opportunities for encounters with people and places in other countries when so little is done to exploit the potential for 'language-and-culture learning' that this material represents.[66]

Even texts that provide substantial information about a foreign country and texts that represent foreign countries' literary canon are, often, used exclusively for linguistic purposes. One commonly used strategy is to encourage work with some of the vocabulary that the text presents, and students are also often asked to answer true / false statements or to match split sentences that refer to surface details in the text.

Flight and *New People, New Places* make extensive use of comprehension questions, and virtually every text in these series is followed by a list of comprehension questions. Most of these questions are geared towards language practice in the way that they ask students to retell parts of the text and they also aim, as pointed out by Ibsen & Wiland (2000), to check whether or not the students have read the text at all. The questions below follow an excerpt from *Across the Barricades*, a fictional text about the love relationship between a Protestant girl and a Catholic boy in Northern Ireland:

> **Understanding the text**
> 1 Where are Sadie and Kevin?
> 2 What is the one thing against their relationship that doesn't matter
> when they are together?
> 3 What does Kevin has to do as a Catholic?[67]
> 4 What does Kevin say about the Protestants?

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[66] The term 'language-and-culture' learning is Byram & Morgan's (1994).

[67] It should be noted that this is an accurate quote. There are many more misprints and other language errors in *New People, New Places* than in the other textbook series. The most bizarre result of poor copy-editing can be found in the acknowledgements in the back of each student's book: 'All efforts have been made to find some of the copyright holders in vain' (*NPNP 1*: 288; *NPNP 2*: 302; *NPNP 3*: 318).

5 What is it that Sadie says that makes Kevin go?
6 Where does Sadie work? […] (*New People, New Places 2*: 21)

As the example illustrates, all the answers can be lifted directly out of the text, and not much thinking or reflection is required on the students' part. Thus, when it comes to the students' understanding of the overall meaning of the text, the questions will probably not be of much help. In fact, it can be argued that, when questions and exercises ask students to recapitulate rather superficial and unimportant details from the text, they contribute to drawing the students' attention *away* from the more important and interesting issues that the text deals with.

It is worth remembering that the focus on language practice and reading comprehension does not, in itself, exclude a focus on other meaningful aspects of the texts. A chapter about London in *Flight 8*, for example, shows how traditional language practice exercises can be used to reinforce cultural information. Here, even some of the grammar exercises follow up and add to the information that the chapter provides about London:

Fill in the correct relative pronoun:
1. It's the Queen ………… lives in Buckingham Palace.
2. The river ………. runs through London is called the Thames.
3. There is the policeman ……. gave me a fine.
4. The building ………. you can see over there is the National Gallery
5. It was Lord Nelson ……… led the British fleet […] (*Flight 8 WB*: 66)

Comprehension questions can, of course, also be formulated in such a way that they draw the students' attention to important aspects of a text. The questions below are attached to a text about the American Civil War, and they will probably help the learners extract the most important pieces of information that the text provides:

1 How can you say that there were two "Americas" around 1850?
2 Why did the eleven states withdraw from the Union?
3 What were the most important issues the war was fought over?
4 Why did the North win?
5 In what way is a civil war different from other wars? (*Flight 9*: 139)

One obvious approach if one wants to combine language practice with a focus on other aspects of the text is to provide students with 'open' exercises. If students are given

open-ended questions and exercises, this will allow them to approach the text in individual ways and to discover and work with different aspects of it (Fenner & Newby 2001).

In accordance with the intentions expressed in the teacher's guides, *Search* provides many examples of such exercises (see section 6.1.2). When asking students to recapitulate a text, for example, the focus is never on isolated words or pieces of information. Rather, the focus is on 'higher levels' of the text, and the students are asked for instance to make headings for each paragraph or to make brief summaries of (parts of) the text. In addition, *Search* provides an abundance of questions and activities that encourage students to voice their own interpretations of and reactions to the texts.[68] Although most of these exercises do not explicitly call for work with questions of context and culture in the texts, it is obvious that they open for focus on such issues.

The main problem with the exercise material is that it seems to be randomly distributed among the texts with culture-specific reference. While some texts are followed by comprehension questions that check, meticulously, that the students have grasped the main pieces of information, other texts have no such exercises attached to them. Students are, for example, never asked about the considerable amounts of biographical information that is provided about the different authors. Many of the exercises that are attached to the excerpts from literary classics also fail to focus on the special qualities of the texts and to indicate to the students why these particular texts have been selected.[69] In this way, unclear messages seem to be given about the importance and the function of the cultural material in the textbooks. This, it can be argued, will probably contribute neither to the students' motivation nor to their dedication when it comes to work with cultural issues as part of the English language course.

The strategy mentioned in the previous section of trying to link the content of the text to the students' own experience can probably also be said to reduce the potential that many texts have when it comes to providing students with information

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[68] This issue will be followed up in section 10.2.2.
[69] This point will be followed up in section 7.3.

180

about and encounters with foreign cultures. An excerpt from a South African girl's diary can serve as an example here. The text provides a lot of information about contemporary issues in South Africa, about challenges in the South African school system as well as about the girl's own situation, but the students are only asked to work with the topic of the text in terms of their own experience with it:

a   Pretend that you are new in your class. Write a text about your first day at school.
b   Write ten sentences about what your class could do to make a new boy or girl feel welcome.
c   Imagine that you are 'the only one' of something in your class. Write a text about what it feels like (*Search 10*: 69).

Questions like these can, clearly, be useful when it comes to 'reconnecting' the text to the students' own contexts and they may help them see the relevance of the issue in their own situation. At the same time, there may be reason to question a strategy that seems to imply that the learners are, and have a right to be, interested only in themselves. In a foreign language textbook, such an approach must be said to represent a missed opportunity when it comes to opening the students' eyes to new perspectives and new ways of looking at the world. It can also, of course, be described as a quite ethnocentric approach to foreign language learning.

A prevalent strategy in the textbooks is to present a small taste of a foreign culture, and then indicate that further work with the topic is optional. Especially in *Flight*, *New People, New Places* and *Catch,* most suggestions for work with cultural issues are linked to extra writing exercises and project work. The scope is broad, from rivers and cities in the United States to Mother Theresa and Shakespeare's Globe Theater (*NPNP 2*: 82; *NPNP 3*: 93; *NPNP 3*: 186). The selection of topics may seem arbitrary and, since these activities are not included in the main body of exercises, the message may be conveyed that they are not very important. Nevertheless, they represent a valuable opportunity to expand on the cultural material presented in the books.

In *New People, New Places* there are many exercises called 'Present It' which encourage the students to present the extra information that they have found for the rest of the class, thus providing them with an opportunity to use the material in

situations of active language use. Another important aspect of these exercises is that they represent the main opportunity for students to define their own approaches to learning and to work with topics that they are particularly interested in.

Some exercises do not only focus on cultural questions, - they provide cultural information of their own. Four worksheets that are included in the *Catch 9* teacher's guide show how information gap exercises can be used in order both to present and to reinforce cultural information. One exercise asks students to exchange information about famous sites in the city of New Orleans, while the other exercise has to do with notable dates in English-speaking countries (*Catch 9 TG*: 18-19; ibid: 118-119). The *New People, New Places* teacher's guides also include information gap exercises, in a different format. Here, information is written as questions and answers on cards that are to be shuffled about and then matched. These cards provide a considerable amount of extra information about a number of countries and cultural phenomena, and they can also be said to indicate a motivating and effective way of imparting such information by way of valuable language practice (eg *NPNP 1 TG*: 105-6; ibid: 115-116; ibid: 119-120; ibid 123-124).

6.4 Summary and discussion

Since a great majority of the prose texts for reading and listening can be placed in a specific cultural context, it may seem that today's textbooks do not continue the tradition of presenting 'culture-neutral' contexts. However, the previous discussion has shown that the texts vary a great deal in terms of culture-specific reference, and that many texts could contribute much more to the students' learning if more information was provided about the context in which the texts are set. The discussion has also pointed out great potential for improvement in future textbooks when it comes to including introductions and exercises that draw the students' attention to aspects of context and culture in the texts.

First of all, future textbooks could avoid the tendency to deal with issues only in terms of the students' own understanding of them. In the textbooks that have been investigated in the present study, human concerns and conditions are often dealt with in texts that refer to a generally Western universe. The cultural content that many texts

present is also often followed up only in general terms, with reference to the students' own experience and understanding.

While it is, of course, always a concern to appeal to the students' interests and to help them relate the learning of English to their own experience, there is also an obvious need for foreign language education to expose the learners to information about and encounters with other cultures. There is no reason why one concern should exclude the other. Rather, texts and topics could be designed in such a way that students can be able to relate to the topics and the contexts that are dealt with, while their eyes are opened to new worlds at the same time.

Secondly, future textbooks could aim at providing clearer signals as to what the objectives related to the cultural materials are and also make sure that the same signals are sent by the cultural material and the exercises that are attached to it. In the textbooks investigated, many texts have clear culture-specific reference in the way that they provide factual information about foreign countries or represent an example of the foreign country's fictional literature. The majority of exercises attached to these texts, however, focus on linguistic aspects of the texts only. Questions and exercises that follow up the cultural content that a text provides are relatively rare; questions and exercises that draw the students' attention to aspects of the situational contexts virtually non-existent.[70]

Although there are good reasons to make sure that most texts in a foreign language textbook can be related to a specific cultural context one can, of course, never be certain how valid and representative the references to foreign cultures and contexts are. But this does not reduce the importance of focusing on and exploring aspects of context and culture in a text. Rather than searching for definite answers and conclusions, a text can be worked with in terms of the many possible meanings that it opens for. With the students' own understanding as a starting point, work can be done in order to broaden their perspective and to develop an awareness of the many interpretations and understandings that can be implied in a text.

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[70] This point will be followed up in section 8.2.

7 The cultural material in the textbooks

This chapter provides a description and a discussion of the cultural material in the textbooks, ie the texts and the illustrations that refer to specific cultural contexts. My main focus is on the choices that the textbook authors have made when it comes to the countries that are focused on, the texts and topics that are presented and the approaches that are suggested for the students' work with the material. The choices are discussed in terms of the rationale that they seem to be based on and the impact that they may have on work with questions of context and culture in the foreign language classroom. The selection of materials and approaches is also discussed with reference to alternative choices that could be made in future textbooks.

Most of the cultural material is presented in the form of prose texts that the students are offered for reading and listening, and these texts are dealt with in sections 7.2 (non-fictional texts) and 7.3 (fictional texts). Section 7.1 provides an introduction to this discussion in the way that it establishes the ratio of non-fictional and fictional texts in the textbooks (section 7.1.1) and the ratio of prose text lines that is devoted to the presentation of different countries (section 7.1.2). As indicated in Chapter 4, the discussion of the prose texts is organized according to the countries that the texts refer to.

The other sources for cultural learning that are included in the books are presented and discussed in section 7.4. Here, I look at the selection of poetry, songs and illustrations and the function that these materials have been given in the different textbook series. The extra cultural material that is included in the teacher's guides is also investigated.

7.1 The prose texts with culture-specific reference – an introduction

7.1.1 The ratio of non-fictional and fictional texts

In accordance with the suggestions made in the English syllabus, all four textbook series include a considerable number of fictional texts. Table 7.1 shows that, on average, almost half of the prose text lines are devoted to fictional texts (48 %). *Flight, New People, New Places* and *Search* all allot more space to non-fictional than to

fictional texts (54, 54 and 55 %, respectively). In *Catch,* however, more lines are devoted to fiction than to non-fiction (56 versus 44 %).

Table 7.1: The ratio of fictional and non-fictional prose texts, in percent[71]

TEXT TYPE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	AVERAGE
Fictional texts	.46	.46	.45	.56	.48
Non-fictional texts	.54	.54	.55	.44	.52
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Some of the non-fictional texts are quite long, but many of them, such as information-focused texts and dialogues, are very brief. Most of the fictional texts, on the other hand, are long. This means that, although Table 7.1 indicates that fictional and non-fictional texts take up approximately the same amount of space in the textbooks, there are many more individual non-fictional than fictional texts.

As indicated in the previous chapter, a large majority of the prose texts for reading and listening in the textbook series can be placed in a specific cultural context. Table 6.1 showed that, on average, 82 percent of the prose text lines have been found to have culture-specific reference. When we differentiate between non-fictional and fictional texts, the same ratio can be seen in the two types of text. Table 7.2 shows that 83 percent of the fictional texts refer to a specific cultural context, while 80 percent of the non-fictional texts do the same.

Table 7.2: The ratio of fictional and non-fictional texts with and without culture-specific reference, in percent, all textbook series

CULTURE REFERENCE	FICTIONAL TEXTS	NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS
With culture-specific reference	.83	.80
Without culture-specific ref.	.17	.20
Total	100	100

As shown in Table 4.1, the textbook series vary considerably in length. *Flight 8* for example, consists of 426 pages (textbook and workbook), while *Catch 8* has only 238 pages.[72] Nevertheless, although the actual number of prose text lines varies from one

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[71] Numerical data are provided in the appendix.
[72] The exact number of prose text lines in each textbook series is presented in Tables 6.1.A and 7.1.A in the appendix.

textbook to another, the figures in the tables above indicate that students get ample opportunities to meet both fictional and non-fictional texts that refer to specific cultural contexts no matter which textbook series they work with.

There are several reasons why I discuss fictional and non-fictional texts separately in the following sections. First of all, as mentioned in section 3.5.2, fictional and non-fictional texts can be said to represent culture in fundamentally different ways and open for different types of learning and experience. Also, it seems that quite different considerations could underlie the selection of the two types of texts, and different objectives can be linked to the students' work with them. My special focus on fictional texts in section 7.3 is also motivated by the importance that the English syllabus in *L-97* attaches to students' work with specific literary texts.

7.1.2 The range of countries presented

In order to determine which countries are given priority in the textbooks, I have coded the prose texts with culture-specific reference in terms of the country that they refer to. Table 7.3 shows that both the fictional and the non-fictional texts focus primarily on the presentation of the United Kingdom and the United States. The United Kingdom gets the most extensive coverage (32 and 28 % respectively), while the United States follows close behind (31 and 26 %).

Table 7.3 The percentage of fictional and non-fictional texts devoted to different countries, all textbook series

CULTURE REFERENCE	FICTIONAL TEXTS	NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS
United Kingdom	.32	.28
United States	.31	.26
Other countries	.20	.26
Without culture-specific ref.	.17	.20
Total	100	100

If we look at the individual textbook series, without distinguishing between fictional and non-fictional texts, we see that all four textbook series devote close to sixty percent of the prose text lines to issues that have to do with one of these two countries (see Table 7.4). In *Search,* a significantly higher number of prose text lines refer to the United Kingdom than to the United States (34 versus 25 %). Other than this, the

textbook series show great consensus when it comes to the relative distribution of texts that refer to the two countries and, thus, to the position that they should be given in an English course.

Table 7.4: The percentage of prose text lines devoted to different countries, specified for each textbook series

CULTURAL REFERENCE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	AVERAGE
United Kingdom	.27	.31	.34	.29	.30
United States	.29	.31	.25	.29	.29
Other English-sp. countries	.12	.24	.17	.17	.17
Non English-speaking countries	.03	.02	.10	.09	.06
Without culture-specific ref.	.29	.12	.14	.16	.18
Total	100	100	100	100	100

It can be concluded, then, that present-day textbooks for the teaching of English maintain the long tradition of centering the cultural material in the teaching of English round the United Kingdom and the Unites States. But the four textbook series also devote a considerable amount of space to other countries in the English-speaking world. As Table 7.4 shows, approximately one fourth of the texts in *New People, New Places* take up issues related to English-speaking countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States, while the figure for the other textbook series is somewhat lower.

A wide variety of places in the English-speaking world are covered (see Table 7.5). If the four textbook series are seen together, Australia is the country that gets the most extensive coverage. Nine percent of the prose text lines in *Catch* have to do with things Australian, but all the other textbook series include material about Australia as well.[73] Ireland is also covered in all the textbook series, and especially *Search* includes a considerable amount of material about this country. Other English-speaking countries, such as Canada, New Zealand and some of the last British colonies get more sporadic coverage.

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[73] The number of lines devoted to the presentation of the different countries is shown in Table 7.5 A in the appendix.

Table 7.5: The prose texts' presentation of countries other than the UK and the US

COUNTRIES	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*
Australia	X	X	X	X
Canada	X	X		X
India	X	X	X	
Ireland	X	X	X	X
Jamaica		X		
Malta			X	
New Zealand	X			X
South Africa		X	X	X
'The last British colonies'	X			
Zimbabwe			X	
Norway	X	X	X	X
Other non English-speaking countries	X	X	X	X

Table 7.5 shows that some 'outer circle' countries, ie countries where English is an important second language, are also presented.[74] *New People, New Places* and *Search* devote one chapter each to the presentation of India, and S*earch* has a whole chapter about Malta. All the textbook series except *Flight* present South Africa in one or more texts.

All textbook series also include some texts that refer to a country in which English is not a national language. Both *Catch* and *Search* have quite a large proportion of texts that are set in countries outside the English-speaking world (nine and ten %, respectively; see Table 7.4). One of these countries is Norway which, as Table 7.5 shows, is referred to in one or more texts in all textbook series.

7.2 The non-fictional texts

The following discussion of the non-fictional texts and the exercises that accompany them focuses on the selection of topics related to each country and the objectives that seem to be linked to the students' work with them. For the sake of clarity, the discussion is ordered according to the country that each text refers to, and the countries are presented in the order that corresponds to the amount of material that is devoted to them in the textbook series. Thus, the first sections deal with the United Kingdom and the United States, followed by the countries that get less extensive coverage.

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[74] The terms 'inner circle', 'outer circle' and 'expanding circle' are Kachru's (1985), see section 3.2.1.

The texts are discussed in terms of the three content areas described in section 4.4.5, namely

- history and cultural heritage
- contemporary issues and general information
- presentation of individual people.

The non-fictional prose texts that refer to the United Kingdom and the United States, which constitute the bulk of the material, have also been coded in terms of these categories.

7.2.1 Non-fictional texts: The United Kingdom

It was indicated in Table 7.4 that, on average, thirty percent of the prose text lines in the textbooks refer to the United Kingdom. Table 7.6 shows that these lines are, in all four textbook series, quite evenly distributed between fictional and non-fictional texts. This means that approximately fifteen percent of the prose text lines in each textbook series are non-fictional texts that have to do with the United Kingdom.

Table 7.6: The prose texts that refer to the United Kingdom.
The distribution of fictional and non-fictional prose text lines, in percent

TEXT TYPE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	AVERAGE
Non-fictional texts	.45	.54	.50	.50	.50
Fictional texts	.55	.46	.50	.50	.50
Total	100	100	100	100	100

When coding the non-fictional texts that refer to the United Kingdom in terms of the three content areas, we find that a considerable number of them take up historical issues and aspects of the country's cultural heritage. Table 7.7 shows that *Flight, New People, New Places* and *Catch* devote as much as 52 percent of the non-fictional prose text lines to this content area, while the corresponding figure in *Search* is 43 percent. Less than one third of the prose text lines provide general information about the country and / or take up contemporary issues (an average of 29 %), while approximately one fifth of the lines focus on the presentation of individual people (an average of 21%).

Table 7.7: The non-fictional texts that refer to the United Kingdom.
The distribution of prose text lines devoted to different content areas, in percent

CONTENT AREA	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	AVERAGE
History, cultural heritage	.52	.52	.43	.52	.50
Cont. issues and general info.	.26	.36	.30	.26	.29
Presentation of individual people	.22	.12	.27	.22	.21
Total	100	100	100	100	100

As indicated in Chapter 5, the English syllabus in *L-97* states that students at the lower secondary level are expected to learn about 'historical and current developments in English-speaking countries' (*C-99*: 244). In this way, the syllabus provides an explanation why the textbooks concern themselves with British history and cultural heritage. Still, the textbook authors must be said to have emphasized this content area more than the syllabus asks for. Which purposes, then, can these texts be said to serve?

Quite a few of the texts provide background information about the authors of the fictional texts. Most of these texts are very brief, but central authors like William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and Agatha Christie are presented quite thoroughly (eg *NPNP* 3: 182-185; *Flight* 8: 78; *Flight* 10: 47). Although no questions and exercises follow up the information that is given, the texts must be said to convey the message that these are people the students ought to know about.

The conflict in Northern Ireland is covered in all the textbook series.[75] Some of the texts provide an impression of the difficulties involved in trying to 'win the peace' and also of the impact that the conflict has on the lives of people in the province today (*NPNP 2*: 18-20; *Flight 10*: 78-79). The main emphasis, however, is on the historical background to the conflict, and many questions and exercises follow up and reinforce the information that is presented.

The other texts that have been coded as having to do with British history and cultural heritage cover a great variety of topics, and most of them signal that they have been included primarily in order to provide the students with an interesting and motivating 'carrier content' for their work with the language. Both the selection of

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[75] This topic seems to have acquired a unique position in English language textbooks in Norway, as it was also covered in the two textbook series that were most widely used in the 1970s and 1980s, This Way (Mellgren et al 1972-74) and People and Places (Amland et al 1985-87).

topics and the fact that very few questions and exercises address the students' understanding of the information that is provided contribute to this impression.

Many little 'tastes' of British history are presented in a way that will probably be quite easily digestible for the students. There are, for example, many personal and anecdotal stories about famous people such as King Henry VIII, Florence Nightingale and Winston Churchill (*Search 9*: 41-42; *Catch 9*: 148; *Search 10*: 191-192) and people from the more recent past, exemplified by Princess Diana and the Beatles, are also presented (*Search 9:* 48; ibid: 60-63).

Quite a few texts add a historical perspective to the topic that the chapter deals with. Thus, there is a text about Jack the Ripper in a chapter about crime, and there are two long texts about the first steam locomotive and George Stephenson who invented it in a chapter about inventions (*Flight 8*: 145-149; ibid: 117-122). Many of the texts that have to do with the United Kingdom as a tourist destination are told from a historical perspective as well. All the textbook series include such texts, and students learn, for example, about the history of the Tower of London, the life and work of Madame Tussaud and about the historical development of Loch Ness as a tourist attraction (*NPNP 1*: 30- 32; *Flight 8 WB*: 74-75; *Catch 8*: 114-115; *Search 10*: 219).

The authors may, of course, be right in assuming that the students will enjoy getting small glimpses of British history. Still, when the target group is teenage language learners, it may seem strange that so many texts present British society from a historical rather than from a contemporary perspective. It can also be argued that the focus on history is, sometimes, rather contrived. One example can be seen in a chapter about Christmas, where students are invited to read about the historical background of the mince pie tradition:

> The choir boys in the picture tasted lots of different mince pies. So we thought you might like to know where mince pies came from […] (*Catch 8*: 89).

Another criticism that can be made of some of the texts that present British history is that they are quite difficult to access, because of the density of the information provided and the lack of other texts that could have supported and helped explain the

historical context. 'Mary, Queen of Scots' and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' are examples of such texts (*Catch 9*: 167-168; *NPNP 1*: 126-127).

The texts that fall into the category 'contemporary issues and general information' have a primary focus on tourism. Most of them present things to see and do in London, but there is also a long text about 'Bonnie Scotland' in *New People, New Places 1* and a whole chapter in *Catch 9* which is devoted to Edinburgh as a tourist destination. Several texts about 'Nessie', bagpipes and the Scottish highland games must probably be seen as attempts to motivate students to travel to the United Kingdom as well (*Flight 8*: 162-163; *Flight 8 TG*: 38; *NPNP 1 TG*: 60; *Search 9*: 196-197).

The other texts that have to do with contemporary Britain deal with topics that, on the whole, seem to have been rather haphazardly chosen. Many texts must have been selected, first and foremost, in order to fit in with the topic of the chapter, and quite a few of them have only vague culture-specific reference. Some examples of such texts were mentioned in section 6.2.2.

Search is the only textbook series that, apparently, aims to provide the students with thorough and substantial knowledge about the United Kingdom and not just incidental glimpses of the country. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that *Search* is the only series that presents the different parts of the United Kingdom with a map and survey information about the different regions (*Search 10*: 208-211). In *Search,* students also learn about British newspapers and magazines (*Search 9*: 163-165), British radio and television (*Search 9*: 167-174), British sports (*Search 9*: 192-193), traffic signs (*Search 8*: 48) and the Welsh language (*Search 10*: 217).

The topics that *Search* presents here can be seen to answer the call for information that can give foreign language learners access to some of the 'cultural competence' that native speakers of the language have. Such information, it is argued, can be linked directly to the development of the students' communication skills, as it will help them understand some of the cultural references that can be made in a communication situation (Brøgger 1992). A text that is included in *New People, New Places,* 'The Roots of the Future' can also be seen in this light. Here, central and

thorough information is provided about the diversity of the British population and about the origin of the different ethnic groups (*NPNP 3*: 62-66).

The only aspect of contemporary Britain that is dealt with in all textbook series is the school system. As indicated in Chapter 5, this is one of the few cultural topics that are mentioned explicitly in *L-97*. It is also, of course, a natural topic to focus on if one wants to provide students with insight into British people's 'cultural competence'.

Most of the material aims to provide the students with an understanding of the differences between the British and the Norwegian school system. *Search,* for example, lets the following activities accompany a survey of levels and exams in British schools:

> Look at the table on page 29 and find out:
> > when English children start school.
> > what the different stages of school are called?
> > what exams English students take.76
> Make a similar table for the Norwegian school system and compare the two systems.
> Work with a partner and pretend that he or she is English. Explain the Norwegian system to your 'English' friend (*Search 8*: 30).

New People, New Places indicates how cultural learning and reflection can result from close scrutiny of pictures. In a rare example of an 'open' question related to an illustration, students are asked to explore four color photographs and captions that present different aspects of the British school system:

> 'What do you learn about English schools from these pictures? Mention some things that are different from Norwegian schools' (*NPNP 1*: 145).

In *Flight*, British schools are presented in a discursive text.[77] Here, students get substantial information about different aspects of the British school system at the same time as they are addressed throughout the text and asked to reflect on the differences between British and Norwegian schools. It is also one of the few texts in the textbook series that give the students an opportunity to see themselves from a foreigner's perspective:

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[76] The textbook uses the punctuation which is quoted here.
[77] The term refers to Selander's (1995) distinction between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts (see section 3.6.3).

A British teenager would probably not think much of your packed lunch: a couple of slices of bread, which you eat in your classroom in your long break (*Flight 8*: 12).

Some other texts deal with cultural differences as well, and the focus of attention here is the ways in which Christmas is celebrated in Norway and in the United Kingdom (eg *Catch 8*: 88; ibid: 94-95; *Catch 9*: 76-78; *Flight 8*: 74-77; *Search 8*: 93-94). One chapter in *Catch* draws the students' attention to the fact that Christmas may mean very different things to different people, and also to the fact that 'Not everyone celebrates Christmas' (*Catch 9*: 86-87).

In drawing the students' attention to cultural differences, texts like these are, clearly, relevant for purposes of intercultural learning.[78] Texts that present individual people's own stories may be particularly useful, in the way that they can trigger the students' personal involvement and reflection on possible similarities and differences between other people's experiences and their own. In the textbooks investigated, quite a few texts provide such personal stories, for example in the form of letters and monologues by British school children who tell their readers about a typical school day, about school meals and school uniforms (*Search 8*: 32-33; *NPNP 1*: 152-153; *Catch 8*: 12; *Catch 8 TG*: 11). It is worth noticing, however, that the exercise material follows up the personal opinions and insights that these stories present to a very limited degree.

As indicated in Table 7.7, approximately one fifth of the non-fictional prose text lines that have to do with the United Kingdom present individual people. A large number of these people are youngsters who talk about school and school life which is, of course, a natural choice in a foreign language textbook for young people. Other texts, however, seem to provide insights into rather arbitrarily selected segments of the British population. It could be argued that a rather unfortunate result of this can be seen in *Flight,* where most of the people we meet are criminals. Pickpockets, hooligans, shoplifters, drug addicts and armed robbers appear in several short texts (*Flight 8*: 134-135; *Flight 8 WB*: 172-173). Three of the fictional texts deal with criminals as well (see section 7.3.1). In *Search*, outsiders in British society also get due

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[78] This point is followed up in Chapter 9.

coverage. In the chapter about London in *Search 8* the only British people students can read about are pickpockets and homeless people (*Search 8*: 118-121). Although it may be impossible for a language course at this level to meet Byram & Morgan's (1994) call for representative pictures to be given of a foreign country, it seems obvious that such a biased presentation of a country's population ought to be avoided.

Most of the texts that present individual people are quite brief, and the people involved appear only as speakers of a few lines in a monologue, a dialogue or an interview. Focus is, most often, on the factual information that the persons provide and, especially the interviews that are used as the basis for listening comprehension, show only the 'transactional' and not the 'interactional' function of language.[79] One example is the interview with a British athlete, Roger Black, who is asked to describe the contents of his refrigerator. The students' task is to name as many food items as possible (*Catch 10 TG*: 58).

In this way, students get relatively few opportunities to meet 'real' British people that they can get involved with on a personal level.[80] However, some examples can be given of texts that are longer and more person-focused. One text in *Search* is about a handicapped football player, Chris Perrior, who will probably come across to the students as a 'real' and believable person. A question attached to this text is also worth mentioning, as it is one of very few activities in the textbook series that link up with many Norwegian boys' considerable knowledge about and interest in British football:

> Chris thinks there are too many foreign football players in English clubs.
> Why does he think so? Do you agree with him? Make a list of arguments
> for and against Norwegians playing for foreign clubs (*Search 9*: 188).

New People, New Places provides another example of a way in which 'real' people can be presented. Here, four young Londoners present themselves by way of a snapshot and a brief text. Although very little information is provided, the fact that the youngsters convey some of their own thoughts and opinions give these texts a personal

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[79] These terms are presented in section 3.3.3.
[80] The reference is to Risager's (1991) call for 'real' people to be presented in 'micro level' texts, see sections 2.4.6 and 3.2.2.

touch. The photographs also add to the impression that we have to do with 'real' people:

> My name is Ian Colton and I'm 14 years old.
> I go to St Mark's Catholic School here in London.
> I'm very keen on sports and I like football best.
> I'm not so keen on our school uniforms, though. It seems daft having to wear a uniform. I mean, I'm not in the army, am I? (*NPNP 1*: 10)

The development of the students' socio-cultural competence does not seem to have been a primary concern when the textbook authors selected non-fictional texts related to the United Kingdom. There is a lack of texts, commentaries and exercises that draw the students' attention to different discourse conventions and the do's and don'ts in British society. The fact that very few texts present 'real' British people and their everyday experience and concerns also leads one to the conclusion that the material provides limited opportunities for students to explore the ways in which language is used in different situational contexts. This point will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

7.2.2 Non-fictional texts: The United States

As already indicated, there are almost as many prose text lines that refer to the United States as there are lines that refer to the United Kingdom in the textbook series (see Table 7.4). There is some variation in the distribution of non-fictional and fictional texts that have to do with the United States in the textbook series but, on average, there are almost as many non-fictional texts as there are fictional ones (see Table 7.8). The total volume of the texts that will be discussed in the following, then, is only slightly less than that of the non-fictional texts that were discussed in the previous section.

Table 7.8: The prose texts that refer to the United States.
The distribution of fictional and non-fictional prose text lines, in percent

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	AVERAGE
Non-fictional texts	.44	.50	.55	.41	.47½
Fictional texts	.56	.50	.45	.59	.52½
Total	100	100	100	100	100

A large majority of the non-fictional texts take up issues related to American history and / or cultural heritage, 59 percent on average (see Table 7.9). In *Flight* and *Search*, as much as 71 and 66 percent of the non-fictional texts have been coded in this

category, which means that these textbook series contain much more material about American than about British history and cultural heritage. However, quite a few of these texts look at aspects of popular culture and youth culture from a historical perspective, and the topics can thus be said to relate to contemporary American society as well.

Contemporary issues are dealt with in twenty percent of the texts, and approximately the same number of prose text lines has been devoted to texts that present individual American people (21 % on average).

Table 7.9: The non-fictional texts that refer to the United States.
The distribution of prose text lines devoted to different content areas, in percent

CONTENT AREA	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	AVERAGE
History, cultural heritage	.71	.53	.66	.45	.59
Cont. issues and general info.	.17	.18	.26	.21	.20
Presentation of individual people	.12	.29	.08	.34	.21
Total	100	100	100	100	100

A large portion of the texts that present American history and cultural heritage have to do with the history of some of the country's ethnic minorities, and immigration is also dealt with in many texts. Considerable information is provided, for example, about the different waves of immigration and the people who came (*NPNP 2*: 35; ibid: 54-58; *Search 10*: 153-156; *Catch 10*: 32-34).

Native American culture gets quite extensive coverage in all the textbook series except *Catch*. Information is provided both about history, traditional lifestyles, customs and beliefs, and Native American culture emerges as colorful and exciting. Many paintings that show Native American art and scenes from Native American history are also included. This could, perhaps, be said to represent an instance of 'exotism', ie the tendency mentioned in section 3.4.2 to show interest in and even glorify exotic cultures that are far away, while less colorful cultures closer to one's own receive less attention. However, information is also provided about some of the challenges that Native Americans face in contemporary society, and powerful renderings of personal experiences of these challenges are given in fictional texts, poetry and songs (eg *Flight 9*: 39-44; *Search 9*: 142-145).

African-Americans are also dealt with quite extensively in all textbook series, and there is a primary focus on the Civil Rights Movement. All textbook series except *Catch* include an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech 'I have a dream'. *Search* is the textbook series that provides the most substantial coverage of African-American history, as it includes several information-focused texts, one fictional text, three poems by Langston Hughes, two negro spirituals and a song about lynching made famous by Billie Holiday. There is even an example of what a Ku Klux Klan poster looked like (*Search 10*: 173). As always in *Search*, the teacher's guide provides much additional information related to the texts in the textbooks.

White Americans are presented, first and foremost, by way of Norwegian immigrants' letters home to Norway (*Flight 9*: 74-76; *NPNP 2*: 134-135; *Search 10*: 158). But some of the other texts have also been written from a 'white' point of view. One text, in particular, illustrates how the Western, white person's perspective can be presented as the 'obvious' one. The text ''Melting Pot' or 'Salad Bowl'' conveys the message that, while the different ethnic groups 'add flavour and colour to American society', some Americans are considered more American than others:

> Many Mexican and Chinese Americans love hot dogs and pizza.
> Likewise, many Americans eat tacos and spring rolls! (*NPNP 2*: 58)

In addition to topics related to immigration and different ethnic groups, the textbooks also cover The Civil War (*Flight 9*: 138-139; *Search 10*: 166-168), John F. Kennedy (*NPNP 2*: 112-113; *Search 9*: 71) and the Vietnam War, which is presented in the form of soldiers' letters home (*Catch 10*: 162-163; *Search 10*: 196). All these issues must be said to constitute important parts of American people's common knowledge and 'collective cultural identity' (Brøgger 1992). Compared to the coverage of British history in the four textbook series, then, there is a higher degree of consensus in the selection of topics from American history, and the main intention seems to be to provide students with insight into some of the most central aspects of it.

At the same time, the textbooks also bear witness of some of the difficulties involved in presenting a balanced and representative picture of key issues when the space is limited and the main focus is on linguistic rather than on cultural input. For example, while Native Americans and African-Americans are given due coverage,

Hispanics have less reason to be content with the way they are presented in the textbook series. Only *Search* includes a brief, but matter-of-fact description of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States, while *New People, New Places* and *Flight* mention Hispanics only in connection with illegal immigration (*Search 10*: 20; *NPNP 2*: 58; *Flight 9*: 70).

Many topics have, apparently, been chosen in order to link up with the students' own knowledge and experience, and there are texts about topics such as fashion, pop music and Levi's jeans (*Search 9*: 57-60; *NPNP 3*: 160 -164: *Flight 8*: 114-115). Most of these topics are presented from a historical perspective, and students even get to read about the history of 'Pop corn, chips and chewing gum', hamburgers, and Coca-Cola (*NPNP 2*: 188-189; *Flight 8*: 67-68; *Search 10*: 18-19). Questions can certainly be asked why topics such as these are dealt with in terms of their historical development instead of the significance that they have in contemporary American – or Norwegian - society. Also, since the topics probably have been chosen because students already have some knowledge about them, one can wonder why this knowledge is only rarely exploited in the questions and exercises that are attached to the texts.

Search, however, makes a consistent effort to help students 'reconnect' the texts to a context that is real for them. In this textbook series, all the texts that have to do with teenage issues are followed by exercises that address the students' knowledge about and / or experience with the topic. This is illustrated in the example below, which is attached to a text about the flower power movement. The example also indicates the opportunities that *Search* often gives for students to voice their own opinions:

> The hippies smoked marijuana and took powerful drugs like LSD.
> a   Make a list of the drugs you know about.
> b   Two of the most widely used drugs are alcohol and nicotine. Work
>   in groups and discuss if alcohol and cigarettes should be banned
>   (*Search 9*: 74).

Many of the texts in *Flight* represent an exception to the consensus that can be seen in the textbooks' treatment of American history. Here, a variety of topics are presented and many of them can be seen as a result of the fact that *Flight* attaches more

importance to the entertainment value of the texts than the other series do.[81] Quite a few texts reflect the tendency described in the previous section of trying to make historical information easily digestible by way of personal stories about 'great' people. Thus, there are texts, for example, about the sprinter Wilma Rudolph, the first American female astronaut, the illusionist Harry Houdini and Charlie Chaplin (*Flight 9*: 62-65, ibid: 98-100, ibid: 123-127).

Other texts refer to American history by way of isolated pieces of information about rather conspicuous events:

> **Some original weddings, American style:**
> California, 1934: The first nude wedding. The couple and their six attendants were stark naked, while the bishop marrying them was wearing a goatskin to preserve his modesty…(*Flight 10*: 20)

Some of the texts that present very brief pieces of information are linked to other texts that provide more in-depth treatment of a particular topic. The sentences below are included in a chapter that deals with immigration to the United States:

> **Did you know that…**
> - in the 1800s typhus was called "ship fever" because so many immigrants caught this disease on the overcrowded ships?
> - between 1815 and 1915 the number of immigrants to the USA was about the same as the combined populations of Norway, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Denmark and Switzerland today?
> - in New York in the 1800s, there was more crime, prostitution and begging than there is today? (The murder rate, however, is ten times higher today) (*Flight 9*: 78).

There are many such texts, under headings like 'Did you know that' and 'Fun to know'. It is, of course, possible that the juxtaposition of such texts and more traditional, information-focused texts will have a positive motivation effect on some students' language and culture learning. At the same time, many of the texts that present only isolated facts and fragments of information can also be criticized for having low information value and, not least, to convey the message that the cultural content of the book is of no great importance.

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[81] This trait was pointed out in the discussion of *Flight's* use of jokes and anecdotes in section 6.2.5.

A chapter in *Search* is organized by way of several 'stopovers' across the country, in places such as Pearl Harbor, San Francisco and Atlanta (*Search 10*: 5-20). Linked to these different places, students get brief glimpses into American history as well as American contemporary society. Thus, the chapter could, perhaps, also be criticized for its rather fragmentary coverage of a large number of topics. However, since the topics are linked together under the heading 'This Land Is Our Land' – and since some places are given more extensive coverage, the chapter could be said to succeed in indicating the vastness of the country and the diversity of issues that need to be addressed if one wants to learn about - and try to understand – the United States.

When it comes to the presentation of contemporary American society, there is a primary focus on tourism, as in the British texts. The tourist's perspective on the United States is most prominent in *Catch,* where two chapters are organized around Sarah and Ida who write letters and postcards from the places they visit (*Catch 8*: 166-171; *Catch 9*: 8-12). The other textbook series also include descriptions of different tourist destinations, and many of the fictional texts have to do with tourism as well (eg *NPNP 2*: 124- 127; *Flight 9*: 163- 167; *Flight 9 WB*: 50-51; ibid: 125-127).

All textbook series include exercises that involve the planning of a holiday in the United States, and the motivation effect of such activities seems to be taken for granted. In *Catch*, the students are asked to plan a two days' visit to New York (*Catch 10*: 69). Time is the only limiting factor, as nothing is said about the cost of such a stay. Both *New People, New Places* and *Flight* present varieties of this exercise: 'You are going on a holiday across the USA. Where would you like to go and what would you like to see?' (*NPNP 2*: 133). Only in *Search* is it indicated that vacations to the United States may not be possible, or even desirable, for everyone. Here, an exercise that follows a presentation of different places in the United States is phrased like this:

a. Why would you like to visit the USA – or why wouldn't you? Tell your partner(s) your reasons.
b. If you should visit the USA, where would you want to go? Tell your partner(s) and give reasons for your choice (*Search 10*: 8).

It should be noted, however, that the textbooks do not provide any practical information for the tourist, for example about how one gets around in this vast country, what one can eat or where one can spend the night. Also, there are hardly any

exercises that aim to develop the students' ability to use the language appropriately in typical tourist situations.[82] Thus, the focus on tourism must probably be understood as a vehicle for the presentation of motivating bits of information about the country and some of its sights rather than as an attempt to prepare them for tourist activities.

Other aspects of contemporary American society get more sporadic coverage. American schools, for example, are dealt with only briefly in *New People, New Places* and *Flight* (*NPNP 2 TG*: 71; *NPNP 2*: 106; *Flight 10*: 113- 115). Some texts present central phenomena in American culture such as Thanksgiving and Halloween (*Search 8*: 90; *New People, New Places 2 TG*: 77; *Catch 9 TG*: 43-44), while other texts provide insight into the world of American football and baseball (*Flight 9*: 48-49; *Search 9*: 188-189; *Catch 10 TG*: 72-73). These texts describe both how the sports are played and the important position that they have in American society. Thus, in focusing on issues that most Americans probably would consider central to their culture, these texts can be said to represent the type of culture teaching that Brøgger (1992) advocates.[83] The same thing can be said about the texts in *Search 10* that have to do with the Stars and Stripes, the 4th of July, the system of government and the issue of capital punishment (*Search 10*: 11; ibid: 22-26).

American people are, first and foremost, presented in fictional texts and, as will be shown in section 7.3.2, these texts provide many encounters with young people and situations that students, most probably, will experience as both relevant and motivating. Most of the non-fictional texts that present individual Americans, on the other hand, are rather brief and provide only limited opportunities to get to know the persons involved in them as 'real people'. As indicated in Chapter 6 this applies, in particular, to the dialogues that are included in *New People, New Places* (*NPNP 2:* 70-71; ibid: 98-99; ibid: 180-181). However, as also indicated there, introductions and commentaries are sometimes attached to these texts, and they add considerably to the texts' cultural information value.

A few texts provide more personal encounters with American teenagers and their everyday experiences. In *Catch* and *New People, New Places* readers meet Oscar

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[82] This point is followed up in section 8.2.2.
[83] Brøgger's point is presented in section 3.2.2.

Hendrien and Dino Ferri, two young Americans who both live in New York City. Quite extensive information is given about their families' background as relatively recent immigrants to the United States, and also about the young men's everyday lives and personal experience. Some of the personal information is followed up in the activities that are attached to the texts. Close-up photographs of the two add much to the impression that readers here get the chance to meet 'real' and believable people (*Catch 10*: 36-37; *NPNP 2:* 50; *NPNP 2 TG:* 67).

7.2.3 Non-fictional texts: Australia

After the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia is the country that gets most extensive coverage in the textbooks and, as shown in Table 7.5, it is dealt with in all the four textbook series. Still, it must be remembered that only a small portion, less than five percent, of the total number of prose text lines in the textbook series refer to this country (see Tables 7.4 A and 7.5 A in the appendix). A little more than half of these lines are non-fictional texts.

Many of the texts that refer to Australia in the textbooks are told from a tourist's perspective, and the bulk of the section on Australia in *Catch* is written in the form of a Norwegian tourist's diary entries. Sarah is said to have spent a whole year in Australia, yet we hear only about her five-day 'sun and swim holiday' in the Whitsundays (*Catch 10*: 201-205). *Search 8* presents the impressions of a British visitor to Australia, while *New People, New Places* describes a crocodile expedition to Kakadu National Park (*Search 8:* 193-194; *NPNP 1*: 192-194).

These texts focus on the presentation of surface facts only, and few – if any – problems arise on the trips. The protagonists of the texts seem to have unlimited financial resources, and travel effortlessly from one great sight to another. Both these texts must be said to deal with the type of 'royal visit' that Byram (1989) describes in his investigation of foreign language textbooks (see section 2.4.6). Such texts provide, of course, an opportunity to bring the readers to different parts of a country and to present it in a flattering light. At the same time, the tourist perspective is problematic in the way that it provides only a glossy and one-sided picture of a country, and also in the way that it places the students in the role of consumer-oriented tourists.

A high degree of consensus can be seen in the textbooks' selection of information about Australia. All the textbook series introduce the country by way of a two-page picture collage that shows Australian landmarks such as the Sidney opera house and Ayers rock, as well as photographs of beaches, sheep and Aborigines. When it comes to the written material, all textbook series include texts about Australian history and Australian wildlife.

The picture provided of Australia in the textbooks rests primarily on the presentation of the most 'exotic' characteristics of the country. In addition to Australian animals we read about boomerangs, crocodiles and sharks, and there is a strong emphasis on the culture of the Aborigines. There are several texts about the Aborigines' history and present situation and also some Aboriginal myths and legends. Only *New People, New Places* does not include an Aboriginal myth. Two Australian poems are presented, and both of them have been written by Aboriginal poets (*Flight 10*: 98; *Search 8*: 190).

On the other hand, all textbook series also provide information about other – and less exotic - aspects of life in Australia. *Search* is the textbook series that presents the country in the most systematic way. In addition to information about Australian history, Australian wildlife and the Aboriginal population, there are also clear and informative texts about the size of the country, the climatic conditions and some of the differences between Australian and British English. As in the case of the texts that refer to the United Kingdom and the United States, then, it is *Search* that, most clearly and most systematically, sets out to provide the students with insight into some of the most central aspects of the foreign country and its culture.

Australian people are presented in some interviews that illustrate how encounters with 'real' people can be used in very different ways in a foreign language textbook. The interviews in *Catch* are used for listening comprehension and, like the interviews mentioned in section 7.2.1, there is a main focus on the factual information that they convey (*Catch 9 TG*: 79-81). In one of the interviews, however, the person who provides the information is also brought to the students' attention:

> A Listen to what Camilla says on the tape and then write down five
> things about Christmas in Australia.

B Listen to the tape again and write down three things you learn about Camilla (*Catch 9*: 84).

Two texts in *New People, New Places* and *Flight* open for even more personal encounters with Australian people. In one of the texts, the twins Brenda and Bradley Hicks tell about their everyday life and the readers learn, for example, that they play cricket and swim in the afternoons and take Indonesian and Japanese as foreign languages in school. One activity that accompanies the text asks students to write about the 'differences between Australia and Norway as to nature problems, school and what young people do in their free time' (*NPNP* 1: 187). It could be argued that a longer text than the interview would be needed in order for students to be able to write about this. Yet, the text and the task exemplify one way in which students can be encouraged to explore and reflect on the information that is conveyed and also to use an encounter with people in another country as an opportunity to see themselves in a new light.

Another text focuses even more on the differences that can be seen between the lives that youngsters live in Australia and in Norway (*Flight 10*: 90-93). Jeffrey Thompson, a fifteen-year old boy from New South Wales has moved with his family to Trondheim, and when we meet him he has gone to a Norwegian school for six months. The interviewer prompts Jeffrey to relate a number of surface facts about Australia, but Jeffrey also talks about some of the differences between the two countries and the difficulties that he has experienced in trying to adapt to another culture.

Thus, this text can be said to exemplify a useful approach if one wants to work with intercultural issues in a foreign language classroom. In addition to providing information about a foreign culture, it also gives the students an opportunity to see their own country through the eyes of a foreigner. Both the text itself and one of the questions that is attached to it also open the students' eyes to the difficulties that may be involved for anyone who moves to a different country:

If you went to Australia to live for a while, what do you think you would find the most difficult to adjust to? Why? Discuss this in class (*Flight 10*: 93).

7.2.4 Non-fictional texts: Ireland

Ireland is dealt with in all four textbook series, but only an average of 4 percent of the prose texts lines are devoted to texts that refer to Ireland. A little less than half of these lines are non-fictional texts.[84]

Flight and Catch present Ireland in chapters that also deal with other countries, namely Scotland (*Flight*) and Australia (*Catch*), while *Search* and *New People, New Places* devote a whole chapter each to Ireland and Irish culture. All four textbooks series, but *Search* and *New People, New Places* in particular, signal that the main objective with the material is to contribute to the students' knowledge about Ireland.

The country's historical development is a key word here and, as mentioned in section 7.2.1, the part of Irish history that led to the partition of the island is dealt with in several texts. Irish literary tradition is also given a prominent position. All four textbook series present Jonathan Swift and his work in connection with an excerpt from *Gulliver's Travels*, and three of the textbook series write about the limerick tradition.

Information is provided about a wide range of other topics as well, from the language situation to the legend of Saint Patrick. There are also series of texts and pictures that inform the reader about different parts of the country (*Search 9*: 105-113; *NPNP 2*: 8-9). Unlike the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, Ireland is not presented as a tourist destination.

Some foreign visitors to Ireland appear in the texts, but they function only as carriers of information about the country (eg *Flight 8*: 154-155; *NPNP 2*: 10-11). With one exception, a text about a nun who is interviewed in a chapter about careers, the textbooks provide no encounters with Irish people (*Catch 10 TG*: 115-117).

7.2.5 Non-fictional texts: South Africa

Three of the textbook series take their readers to an African country, and they all focus on South Africa (see Table 7.5). In addition, *Search* includes some material about Zimbabwe. In some of the texts in *Search* there is a more overt tourist's perspective than this textbook series uses in the presentation of other countries. There are

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[84] Table 7.5 A in the appendix shows the number of prose text lines devoted to Ireland in the different textbook series.

advertisements for backpacking trips that include rafting on the Zambezi river and bungi-jumping in the Victoria Falls, and there is a report from a safari in Zimbabwe (*Search 10*: 56-60). The students are given five different tasks that ask them to plan, book and report from a holiday in Southern Africa.

In using a tourist's perspective, *Search* is able to create a positive impression of the African continent. But, as mentioned in earlier sections, it can also be problematic to indicate that trips to remote and exotic destinations are within reach for Norwegian teenagers. Unlike the exercises related to travel in the United States and Australia in the other textbook series, however, *Search* does point out one possible problem:

> Work in pairs and roleplay the following situation: One of you is going on a holiday with a friend and has to decide where to stay and for how long. You are also worried about the cost […] (*Search 10*: 56).

The other texts signal that they aim to provide the students with knowledge about South African history and, not least, with some insight into racial issues and the relationships between blacks and whites. In *New People, New Places* and *Catch*, the latter is done by way of fictional texts (see section 7.3.3), while the non-fictional texts provide a survey of South African history (*NPNP* 3: 39) and information about Steve Biko (*Catch* 10: 45-46).

As in the texts related to other countries, *Search* offers the most comprehensive and systematic presentation of the country. In addition to the information-focused texts about South African history and the apartheid system, there are both fictional and non-fictional texts that provide the reader with personal stories about a number of different issues (*Search 10*: 61-77). *Search* also points out and follows up all references in the texts that may be unfamiliar to the students and provides meticulous explanations in introductions and extra texts in the margin. Most of the texts have exercises attached to them that encourage the students to recapitulate and reflect on the information that is given in the texts. In this way, *Search* provides a much clearer signal than the other textbook series do that the non-linguistic content of the texts is important in its own right, and that work with these texts is expected to contribute both towards the students' factual knowledge about South Africa and also towards their understanding of cultural differences.

7.2.6 Non-fictional texts: India

India is presented in a separate chapter both in *New People, New Places* and in *Search*, while *Flight* has only one text for extra reading that refers to India, and *Catch* has none. In *New People, New Places*, India is in fact the country that comes in third in terms of coverage, after the United States and the United Kingdom, and it is dealt with in five percent of the prose text lines.[85] Approximately 60 percent of the lines that refer to India are non-fictional texts.

Both in *Search* and *New People, New Places* there is the clear intention of providing students with substantial knowledge and also with appetizing tastes of the country that may motivate the students to learn more. In *Search,* the authors say this about their aims with the material in the chapter 'Imagining India':

> Why do you think that English is an official language in India? Do you know anything about this huge country? This chapter gives you a chance to learn something about India: food, traditions, languages, literature, history and people. Hopefully, by the end of the chapter, you will want to find out more about India on your own (*Search 9*: 207).

The authors follow up their promise with a variety of texts and topics, and *New People, New Places* also presents India by way of varied information and glimpses of a colorful and complex society.

Indian history is presented in both books, and quite a bit of detail is provided. In *Search*, there is a timeline with main events from 1500 onward, there is a text about Mahatma Gandhi and the historical events that took place in his lifetime, and there is also a text that describes the partition of India in 1947 as a young man experienced it (*Search 9*: 214-218). There are exercises attached to all these texts that encourage the students to work with the factual information that the texts provide and also to find more information about certain issues and events on their own.

In *New People, New Places,* on the other hand, a long text about Indian history and two shorter texts about Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa are all placed in framed boxes under the heading 'Info' (*NPNP 3*: 82, ibid: 93-95). Since these texts are offered in addition to the main texts for reading in the chapter, a message may be sent

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[85] Table 7.5 A in the appendix shows the number of prose text lines devoted to India in the different textbook series.

that these are for extra reading only. At the same time, several suggestions for project work indicate that the students are expected to work with some of this material.

There is no mention of tourism in connection with India, but some of the major sights and well-known aspects of the country are still given a prominent place. Thus, with the clear intention of providing students with a positive impression of India and Indian culture, there are texts and photographs that present Indian wildlife, 'Bollywood', Taj Mahal and the Golden Temple in Amritsar. In *Search* there is also a recipe and a color photograph of an Indian dish, and students are encouraged to 'Spice up your life' (*Search 9*: 212).

Flight exemplifies a potential problem when including texts that are set in cultures that the readers may be quite unfamiliar with. The only text that refers to India in this series is an excerpt from an American women's magazine (*Marie Claire*) that tells the story of a 22-year-old Indian man who is kidnapped for marriage by a family who is too poor to pay a dowry for their daughter (*Flight 10 WB*: 21-23). This text is presented only as extra reading, but it still seems a pity that the textbook series focuses on the poverty and brutality of Indian society without including material that can provide a more nuanced picture of the country.

The texts related to India exemplify three very different ways in which people can be presented. In *New People, New Places,* the Indian girl Narada comes across only as the provider of factual information. The following is part of a dialogue between her and a pen pal who comes to visit:

Narada	[…] You'll find all kinds of people here. After all, there are over six million of us.
Keith	Quite big. Dehli really is a strange mixture of old and new, isn't it?
Narada	Let's say we have contrasts. Rich and poor, beautiful and ugly, ancient and modern.
Keith	I guess so. You even have a space programme, I believe.
Narada	That's nothing compared to our computer technology. We've got the best programmers in the world (*NPNP 3*: 77).

Another text is a monologue that provides students with information about Mohammed Halif's everyday life in the streets of Bombay. Although the text could be said to reinforce a stereotype picture of India as a country of starving children and

corrupt grownups, it is, first and foremost, about a young man who stands forth as a person with great integrity, insight and self-respect, in other words, as a 'real' person (*NPNP 3*: 92).

Yet a different approach can be seen in the text 'An Indian View'. Here, a lady from Bangalore who has spent some time in Bergen tells about and reflects on differences in life-styles and behavior in the two countries. Thus, this text must be said to exemplify a useful format when it comes to teaching Norwegian students about everyday life in a foreign culture while, at the same time, helping them to see their own cultural ways from an outsider's perspective (*Search 9*: 210-211).

7.2.7 Non-fictional texts: Other foreign countries

The students are also taken to other countries, both in and outside the English-speaking world. Some countries are presented quite thoroughly, with the clear intention of providing students with knowledge about the country in question, while other countries are dealt with only sporadically. Many texts have, apparently, been included in order to give the students an impression of the diversity of places in which English is spoken. Other countries are referred to only in passing, and no great importance seems to be attached to the cultural information that the texts convey.

New Zealand gets quite extensive coverage in *Flight*, which presents the country together with Australia in the chapter 'Islands in the south'. As the case is with many other countries in *Flight,* New Zealand is presented by way of quite different texts and topics. One information-focused text and a series of color photographs focus on New Zealand's history and cultural traditions (*Flight 10*: 88-89), while another text provides information in the form of single sentences:

> **Did you know that**
> […]
> - there are good skiing conditions in New Zealand?
> - there is a place called "Norsewood" in New Zealand? This is where a group of Norwegians settled.
> - if a Maori sticks out his tongue at you, he does not mean to show disrespect? It is just a way of greeting (*Flight 10*: 99).

One text describes a British girl's vacation on New Zealand, and it provides substantial information about the country's population, geography, economy and climate (*Flight*

10 WB: 75-78). While the text can be criticized on the grounds that it is written by a person who seems to have unlimited resources both when it comes to time and money, it can also be seen to illustrate how information about a foreign country may be more easily accessible and more motivating for the readers if it is presented by way of a young person's voice.

In *Search*, a whole chapter is devoted to the presentation of Malta. This country has been chosen, the authors say, because it has become common for Norwegian learners of English to go there for summer school (*Search 10*: 133). As usual in *Search,* comprehensive and varied information is provided. There is a main focus on the country's history, but some contemporary issues are also described, such as the tourist industry. A particularly interesting feature of the chapter is that it contains several texts that focus on Maltese mentality, beliefs and everyday life (eg *Search 10 TG*: 71; *Search 10*: 137-138; ibid: 139-140). As indicated in section 3.4, descriptions of 'real' people and the things that they believe and do can be useful in work that aims to contribute to the students' intercultural learning. The texts in the chapter on Malta are some of the very few texts in today's textbooks that address such issues.

Two of the textbook series include chapters that focus on the fact that English is spoken in very different corners of the world, and on some of the reasons for this situation. In addition to some information about the development and the present status of English as a world language, these chapters also include texts that refer to different places in the English-speaking world. However, it may seem confusing that such a great variety of texts and topics have been included and that so few of the texts follow up the chapters' main theme. Jamaica, for example, is dealt with by way of a text about Bob Marley and one of his song lyrics, while factual information is provided about Canada and 'the last British colonies' (*NPNP* 3: 28-29; *Flight 10*: 174-176; ibid: 185-191). There are also some fictional texts (*NPNP* 3: 18-20; ibid: 34-39; *Flight 10*: 193-195). Most of the texts in both chapters are united only by the fact that they all refer to a country in which English is used as a first language.

The textbooks also include some texts that refer to countries where English is not spoken as a native language. There is, for example, a text about Italian traditions in a chapter about Christmas and a text about a refugee from Haiti in a chapter about

immigration to the United States (*Catch 8*: 102; *Flight 9 WB*: 65). There are also some texts that refer to a number of different countries as they describe international phenomena such as soap operas, fashion, pop music and football (*NPNP 3*: 150-152; *Search 9*: 57, ibid: 59-60, ibid: 185).

Since these texts probably have been included only in order to fit in with the topic of the chapter, they provide only incidental glimpses of a seemingly arbitrary selection of topics and places. It could be argued that an alternative approach could be to link texts that refer to countries outside the English-speaking world to the role of English as a lingua franca. Especially in a situation when English is taught as an international language, it would seem very relevant to illustrate how English can be used in encounters between people from virtually any corner of the world.

7.2.8 Non-fictional texts: Multiple countries

Some non-fictional texts involve people who meet across geographical and cultural boundaries and some texts present different customs and traditions around the world. As indicated in section 3.4, texts that have to do with cultural encounters and the comparison of cultures could be seen as particularly relevant in connection with intercultural learning, and some of these texts are therefore discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

It is worth noticing, however, that relatively few of these texts draw the students' attention to the possible challenges – as well as enriching experiences - that cultural diversity and cultural encounters may give rise to. As indicated in earlier sections, few of the texts that have to do with tourism, for example, show tourists who have contact with the inhabitants of the countries that they visit. Whenever people from different countries are seen talking together, the focus is most often on factual information, and little emphasis is attached to describing the personal relationships between the people involved. The dialogue between the Indian girl and her pen pal mentioned in section 7.2.6 is one such text. Another example is a dialogue between a British and an American student who talk together about their respective school systems (*NPNP 2 TG*: 71).

7.2.9 Non-fictional texts: Norway and Norwegians

An obvious reason to deal with Norway in a textbook for the teaching of English would be to help students develop the ability to express themselves in English about things Norwegian. Another reason to focus on Norway and Norwegians could be to draw the students' attention to situations in which Norwegians need to use English in order to communicate. Yet another concern could be to help students gain increased insights into their own culture, both in order to develop their ability to communicate 'across cultural divides' and to contribute to their intercultural awareness and understanding. The textbooks investigated follow up these concerns only to a very limited degree.

New People, New Places is the textbook series that sets out, most explicitly, to prepare students for situations in which they have to talk about their own country and their own culture to people from other places in the world. The material is included in a section in the back of each textbook which is called 'Norwegian pages'. Here, different aspects of life in Norway are presented by way of color photographs, picture captions and lists of vocabulary.

There are 23 photographs altogether, most of which depict beautiful landscape scenes and Norwegians who enjoy different sorts of outdoor activities. A few pictures show everyday situations related to school work and sports activities, and some pictures and captions describe typically Norwegian phenomena such as the confirmation ceremony and the celebration of the national day. All in all, however, the photographs show a rather glossy and idealized picture of the country, and none of them provide any evidence of the cultural diversity of Norwegian society. Only a few exercises open for the possibility that all students may not identify with the rather one-sided pictures that are provided:

> At Easter many Norwegians go skiing in the mountains, where there is still snow. Some stay in a cottage. But not all Norwegians are fond of snow at this time of year. They'd rather get their bikes out, or go for a walk. Describe your Easter holidays (*NPNP 1*: 260).

In the other textbook series, no texts are included that aim specifically at providing students with words and phrases that they can use in order to talk about different phenomena related to Norway and Norwegians. Occasional exercises, however, point

to some aspects of Norwegian culture that the students ought to be able to explain to foreigners, such as the Norwegian language situation and the controversy over the hunting of whales.[86]

Most of the texts that refer to Norway and Norwegian culture have, apparently, been chosen in order to fit in with the other texts in the chapter, and the result is a seemingly arbitrary selection of topics. In a chapter about inventions, for example, there is a text about a Norwegian kick-sled ('sparkstøtting') and a chapter that focuses on environmental protection presents a text about environmental measures during the Lillehammer Olympics (*Flight 8 WB*: 150-151; *Catch 10*: 78-79).

Search includes many more texts that refer to Norway than the other textbooks do and most of them reflect this series' attempts to contribute to the students' knowledge about different issues. The topics range from Viking history and the Unesco site 'Bryggen' in Bergen to different aspects of Sami culture (*Search 8*: 200-208; *Search 10*: 228-231). However, although this focus on things Norwegian may be seen as a positive trait, one could certainly argue that more central topics could have been selected if the intention was to make students able to talk in English about their own country and their own cultural background.

One chapter in *Search* deals with differences between Norwegian and British people and seems to aim, first and foremost, to provide students with an increased awareness of their own culture (*Search 8*: 6-13). Different people convey their impressions of Norway and Norwegians, thus providing the students with the opportunity to see themselves from an outsider's perspective. In one text, six youngsters from England and Ireland tell us what they know about Norway which is, from a Norwegian point of view, very little. In this way, students are shown in a humorous, yet effective, way that Norway is the center of the world only to Norwegians, and that Norwegians may seem as strange to foreigners as foreigners may seem to them (*Search 8*: 6-13).[87]

Very few Norwegians appear in the textbook texts, and no great emphasis is attached to modeling typical situations in which Norwegians need to know English. At

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[86] These exercises are discussed further in section 8.2.2, which focuses on the contexts of language use that students seem to be prepared for.
[87] This chapter is discussed further in section 9.3.1.

the same time, the textbooks must be said to point to tourist situations as natural arenas of English language use, as most Norwegians who appear in the texts do so by way of reports from their travels abroad (eg *Catch 8*: 168-171; *Catch 10*: 201-205; *Search 8*: 44-45; *Search 8 TG*: 81-82). It is worth noticing, however, that no texts describe Norwegians who receive visitors to their own country and only a couple of exercises prepare the students for such situations (see section 8.2.2). Since most students will, at one time or another, need to be able to speak English to foreigners who visit Norway, this seems to be a field of language use that could receive much more attention in the future.

One striking characteristic of present-day textbooks is the relatively high number of texts that show Norwegians who use English when they are communicating with other Norwegians. There are, for example, quite a few letters from Norwegian immigrants who tell the reader about their experiences in America, and there is also a letter home from a Norwegian boy as he takes part in the Boer war (*Flight 9*: 74-76; *Flight 9 WB*: 68; *NPNP2*: 134-136; *Search 10*: 65). In addition, there are some texts that show Norwegians who are speaking English to one another (*Flight 8*: 44-47; *Flight 9*: 72-73). The fact that these people choose English rather than Norwegian when they are communicating is not pointed out as anything out of the ordinary.

In the classroom, Norwegian learners must, of course, practice the language in communication situations with other Norwegians. But is seems strange that many exercises encourage the students to use English in order to communicate with Norwegians outside the classroom as well. They are, for example, asked to act out situations in which they speak or write English to their parents, interview their grandparents or neighbors and write an entry for their local newspaper (eg *NPNP 2*; 130; ibid: 171; *Search 9*: 57; ibid: 163; *Flight 9 WB*: 18). No reasons are given for the inclusion of such artificial situations of foreign language use, and the students' possible bewilderment at having to do such exercises is not addressed. Since it would not be difficult to indicate more realistic communication partners and situations of language use outside the classroom, one can only wonder why this is not done.[88]

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[88] This perspective is followed up in section 10.3.

7.2.10 Non-fictional texts: Summary and discussion

Most of the non-fictional texts in the textbook series have to do with the United Kingdom and the United States. This can, as it is done in the English syllabus, be explained with reference to these countries' central position in the English-speaking world as well as with reference to the close ties that exist between the two countries and Norway. Many of the texts that refer to these countries have, clearly, been selected in order to link up with the students' interests and previous knowledge, while other texts signal that they present new information that the students ought to know about. There are also quite a few texts that have lower information value, and some of the topics give the impression of having been rather haphazardly chosen.

Many non-fictional texts refer to other countries in the English-speaking world as well, and the different countries are presented by way of a wide variety of texts and topics. Although most of these texts have probably been included in order to illustrate the geographical spread of the language, it is worth noticing that very few of them focus on aspects of language and the degree to which and the ways in which English is used.

Norway and Norwegian culture could be a natural focus in a course that teaches English to Norwegian students. The non-fictional texts, however, indicate that present-day textbooks do not attach much importance to making students able to speak about their own country and culture when they use English. Few texts have to do with things Norwegian, and few attempts are made to point to situations in which Norwegians need to use English.

When coding and discussing the non-fictional texts in terms of three different content areas, I found that a large majority of them provide students with information about the history and the cultural heritage of countries in the English-speaking world. Far fewer non-fictional texts are devoted to contemporary issues and general information about the foreign countries, and even fewer texts still provide students with the opportunity to meet individual people.

Some of the historical information is presented in 'ostensive' texts, which contributes to the impression that the material presented is something the students

ought to know about.[89] The tradition of providing students with insight into the countries' 'high' culture can be seen quite clearly here, not least in the substantial information that is provided about the authors of the fictional texts. However, as indicated in section 6.3, quite a few of these texts are followed up only by way of comprehension questions and other exercises that focus on language practice rather than on culture learning. In this way, the textbooks can sometimes be said to communicate two contradictory messages. While information-focused texts indicate to the students that factual information about foreign countries constitutes an essential part of the English course, the exercise material often conveys the message that remembering, learning and understanding this information is of no great importance.

The selection of topics can be said to undermine the perceived importance of the cultural material as well, and also contribute to confusion as to what the objectives with the material are. There is a great mixture of topics and issues, from fact-oriented presentations of central historical events to incidental descriptions of rather peripheral phenomena. In this way, the cultural material must be said to constitute a less than optimal basis for the development of the students' cultural knowledge which, according to the national guidelines for the final exams, they are expected to be able to document at the end of 10th grade (see section 5.3).

Quite a few texts that are told from a historical perspective have to do with issues that students are already familiar with, such as famous tourist attractions and popular foods. Here, it could be argued that, if the intention is to appeal to the students' interests and to link up with their background knowledge, a contemporary rather than a historical perspective could have been chosen. The textbooks can thus be said to illustrate the conflict of trying to provide students with an interesting and motivating 'carrier content' for their language studies on the one hand and the desire to contribute to their factual knowledge on the other. Often, this conflict seems to result in rather contrived texts and it could be argued that, in trying to meet two different objectives, quite a few texts meet neither one of them.

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[89] The term 'ostensive' text refers to Selander's (1995) distinction between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts (see section 3.6.3).

The non-fictional texts that have to do with contemporary issues and general information also cover a variety of topics. A considerable number of them have been written from a tourist's perspective and this focus is, clearly, useful in the way that it makes it possible to provide the students with varied and motivating glimpses of a great number of different places in the English-speaking world. At the same time, placing students in the role of the potential tourist can be problematic, not least when many of the texts describe rather exotic and far away destinations. It is worth noticing, however, that the tourist perspective in the textbooks is toned down in the exercise material, where little emphasis is attached to preparing students for typical tourist situations.

It has been argued that the most natural principle for the selection of cultural topics in a foreign language course is to link the topics directly to the development of the students' socio-cultural insight and communication skills (see section 3.2.2). *Search* is the textbook series that comes closest to this ideal. In the presentation of the United Kingdom, for example, students are informed about basic concepts in this way:

> **Who are the British?**
> Many different terms are used to describe the area where British people live. When foreigners use the word England, meaning Britain, Scottish people are not very pleased. When you talk to British people, it is necessary to get all these different terms right unless you want to offend them.
> **Great Britain** is the name of the island which is made up of England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is not part of Great Britain […]
> (*Search 8*: 14)

Search is also the textbook series that presents the foreign countries in the most systematic way and which makes obvious efforts to provide students with insight into some of the most central aspects of the foreign people's 'cultural competence'. In the presentation of the United States, for example, students are informed about issues such as Thanksgiving, the fourth of July and typical American ball games. However, *Search* is not at all consistent in its focus on information that can be relevant for the development of the students' communication skills. Many of the information-focused texts that are included convey the message that the textbook series aims, first and foremost, to contribute to the students' general education.

In order to develop a person's socio-cultural competence, insight into the foreign people's everyday lives, their values, beliefs and customs seems to be crucial. The non-fictional texts in the textbooks attach, on the whole, little or no importance to this aspect of foreign language learning

The texts also provide few opportunities to meet individuals who come to life as 'real' people. Since dialogues, interviews and even monologues are, most often, designed in order to present factual information, the learners get few chances to get close to the people who appear in the texts. This, it can be argued, greatly reduces the students' opportunities to get personally involved with believable representatives of foreign countries and to develop attitudes of interest and openness towards foreign cultures. A few texts, however, present youngsters who provide more personal information about themselves and, especially the texts that are accompanied by a photograph, can be said to indicate a useful format in which 'real' and believable representatives of the foreign country can be presented.

It must be concluded, then, that the non-fictional texts in present-day textbooks maintain the tradition mentioned in section 2.4.6 of choosing topics in a seemingly arbitrary way and that unclear and, at times even contradictory, objectives seem to be linked to the cultural material. This situation can, of course, be explained with reference to the English syllabus in *L-97,* where it seems to be recommended that students get sporadic glimpses of English-speaking countries and where objectives linked to the students' cultural insight and awareness are not described very clearly.

7.3 The fictional texts

The English syllabus in *L-97* emphasizes the use of a variety of fictional texts and suggests a considerable number of specific texts and / or authors. This chapter investigates how the textbooks follow up these suggestions and how they present the texts and encourage students to work with them. It has already been established that the textbooks, like the English syllabus, have a main focus on British and American fiction. Thus, this section starts out by discussing the fictional texts from the United Kingdom and the United States (sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2), while section 7.3.3 provides a description and discussion of the fictional texts that have been selected from other

countries. Section 7.3.4 sums up the main tendencies that can be seen in the selection of fictional texts and the intentions that seem to be linked to them.

7.3.1 Fictional texts: The United Kingdom

As indicated earlier in this chapter, users of all textbook series get many opportunities to meet and work with fictional texts by British authors. In three of the textbook series half or more than half of the prose texts that refer to a British context are fictional texts. In *New People, New Places* the figure is somewhat lower, but a considerable amount of British fiction is presented in this textbook series, too (46 %; see Table 7.6).

In order to get a clearer picture of the types of fictional texts that students are exposed to, the topics that they deal with and the possible intentions that may be linked to them, the texts have been coded according to the procedures described in Chapter 4. Table 7.10 shows that, when all the textbook series are seen together, the majority of British fictional prose text lines fall into the category 'Children's / teenage literature' (an average of 47 %). *New People, New Places* has a particularly high number of such texts, 70 percent. The high figure can be explained, in part, by the fact that several of the fictional texts that deal with teenage issues in this textbook series are quite long.

Many texts have been classified as having to do with British literary canon and historical issues (an average of 26 %). With the exception of *New People, New Places,* the textbook series show a high degree of consensus when it comes to the space that is devoted to such texts.

Flight includes more texts that fall into the category 'Crime, mystery and entertainment' than the other textbook series do (35%). All the series include a fair number of British fairy tales, myths and legends (an average of 6 %).

Table 7.10: The distribution of different types of British fictional texts, in percent

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	AVERAGE
Canon, historical texts	.30	.10	.32	.32	.26
Children's / teenage literature	.28	.70	.40	.49	.47
Crime, mystery, entertainment	.35	.15	.19	.16	.21
Fairy tales, legends, myths	.07	.05	.09	.03	.06
Total	100	100	100	100	100

When the textbook authors have selected so many texts that have been written for children and teenagers this is, of course, a clear attempt to provide the students with a content that they will find relevant and interesting. But the selection of texts and authors also reflects a concern that is expressed in the English syllabus in *L-97,* namely to expose students to some of the classics in British children's literature. Thus, there are texts by C. S. Lewis and Nina Bawden (who are both mentioned in *L-97*), and an excerpt from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* has also been included (*NPNP 1*: 34-39; *Catch 8*: 158-160; *Catch 9*: 116-123; *Catch 8*: 60-67).

Roald Dahl is mentioned in the English syllabus as well, and all textbook series include one or more texts by him (*Flight 8*: 124-127; *NPNP 3*: 104-105; *Search 8*: 30-31; *Search 9*: 168-169; *Catch 8*: 16-30; *Catch 9*: 32; ibid: 46-50). Since Dahl's books are widely read in Norway, it is natural to see the focus on Dahl and his work as an attempt to link up with the students' prior experience of children's literature. The fact that excerpts from Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole* are presented in all four textbook series can probably be explained in the same way (*Search 8:* 101; *Flight 10*: 144-146; *NPNP 3*: 50-53, *Catch 9*: 140-142).

The fictional texts provide many encounters with British teenagers and insight into many aspects of their everyday lives. One text, 'Used to Get Mad at My School', describes a situation in a classroom where the students argue with their teacher about the proceedings of the lesson (*Search 10*: 86-88). Other texts have to do with family relations and racial tension (eg 'Granny the Pag' (*Catch 9*: 116-123), 'The Granny Project' (*Search 10*: 48-50), 'The Christmas Witch' (*Catch 8*: 97-102), 'To Sir, with Love' (*NPNP 3*: 68-72)). 'Names' is a text for listening that provides information about the British tendency to turn given names into nick-names, and it is also a unique example of language spoken with a dialect (*Search 10 TG*: 38-39).

Common to all these texts, however, is that the references to a British context are not pointed out to the students, and most of the questions and exercises that are attached to the texts focus only on the development of the students' language skills. If the non-linguistic content of the texts is focused on at all, the students are asked to talk about the topic of the text in general terms and, possibly, relate it to their own experience. Thus, as indicated in Chapter 6, the potential that texts like these have

when it comes to opening the students' eyes to different aspects of British everyday life and language use could, clearly, have been exploited better.

Table 7.10 shows that, in three of the textbook series, more than one quarter of the fictional texts that have to do with the United Kingdom represent British literary canon and / or provide historical information. In accordance with the suggestions in *L-97,* many 'big' names are presented, such as Charlotte Brontë (*Flight 10*: 166-168), William Somerset Maugham (*Search 9:* 23-25) and George Bernhard Shaw (*Catch 9*: 125-127; *Catch 9 TG*: 83-84; *Search 9*: 67-70). There are also several texts by Charles Dickens (eg excerpts from *A Christmas Carol (Flight 8*: 78-81; *Catch 9*: 100-104) and *Hard Times* (*Search 10*: 251-252)).

The textbooks also include quite a few texts that have been written by accomplished authors who are not mentioned in the English syllabus. Students are introduced, for example, to texts by Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Geoffrey Chaucer and Dylan Thomas (*Catch 10*: 195-196; *NPNP 3*: 112-115; *Search 8*: 73-75; *Search 10*: 214-216). While these texts must be seen as an attempt to expose students to high quality literature, the selection of the texts also indicates a desire to motivate the students for reading by providing them with an encounter with people their own age. Thus, quite a few of the texts that represent British literary canon have youngsters as protagonists. This is the case, for example, in the excerpts from Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist (*Search 8*: 122-125; ibid: 224-227) and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (*Flight 10*: 166-168).

The most explicit effort to provide students with knowledge about 'high' British culture can be seen in the material that has to do with Shakespeare. All the books for tenth grade include an excerpt either from *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* (*NPNP 3*: 176-178; *Catch 10*: 131; *Flight 10*: 21-25; *Search 10*: 97-98). In addition, all the textbooks provide substantial information about the author himself. *New People, New Places* devotes a whole chapter to Shakespeare, with paintings and bits of information from the Elizabethan era, several excerpts from Shakespeare's plays and also a four-page non-fictional text about his life and work (*NPNP 3*: 174-197).

The English syllabus in *L-97* states that students should 'have the opportunity to work with authentic texts from various periods, including […] extracts from plays, e.g.

by William Shakespeare' (*C-99*: 246). Three of the textbook series meet this requirement by presenting summaries of the action of a play, in addition to very brief excerpts from the text itself. *New People, New Places* has a nine page presentation of *Hamlet* that starts like this:

> **Hamlet's sorrow**.
> Gertrude was the Queen of Denmark. Two months after the death of the King of Denmark, she married Claudius, his brother. She did not know that Claudius was evil. People believed that he had killed his brother so that he himself might become king instead of Hamlet. Hamlet was the son of Gertrude and the king who had just died (*NPNP 3*: 188).

Search provides a brief summary of the action of *Romeo and Juliet* (*Search 10*: 96) and *Catch* provides a summary of the same play in the words of a 15-year-old American high school student:

> Once upon a time… Once upon a time, there were these two families. They were always fighting. The families' last names were Capulet and Montague. The families hated each other so much that even the servants would fight each other. One time a fight was so bad that the Prince told them that they were going to be killed if they ever fought again (*Catch 10 TG*: 84).

By providing long, rather mundane summaries of some of the world's great masterpieces, the textbook authors can be said to signal that it is more important for students to get factual knowledge about British 'big C culture' than to have a personal encounter with Shakespeare's texts. But it is worth noticing that the English syllabus in *L-97* does not, in fact, require that students learn about Shakespeare, his major plays and their status in world literature. Rather, the syllabus states repeatedly that the texts themselves should be the focus of attention. Although the suggested texts are expected, first and foremost, to serve as models for the students' own use of the language, the syllabus also emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of the learning materials and the possibilities that they represent for inspiring and exciting personal experiences (*C-99*: 238).

It may be understandable that the textbook authors consider Shakespeare's own texts to be too difficult for students at this level. Still, it seems a pity that the authors have decided to focus on what Kramsch & Kramsch (2000) refer to as the texts'

significance rather than their beauty. Frank McCourt, in the memoirs from his childhood, indicates that it is possible, even for young people, to appreciate the latter:

> I don't know what it means and I don't care because it's Shakespeare and it's like having jewels in my mouth when I say the words. If I had a whole book of Shakespeare they could keep me in the hospital for a year (McCourt 1997: 222).

As Table 7.10 shows, the textbook series include a considerable amount of fiction that falls into the category crime, mystery and entertainment (21 % on average). Most of these texts have also been written by well-known authors, and Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who are both mentioned in *L-97*, are represented with three texts each (*Catch 10*: 25-26; *Flight 10*: 47-53; *Search 10*: 42-46; *Flight 10 WB*: 40-42; *NPNP 3 TG*: 75; *Catch 10*: 28). Information is provided about these authors as well, and in addition to providing students with motivating texts, the intention is clearly to make students familiar with two 'big' names in British fiction.

Biographical information is also attached to the two texts by Mary Shelley and Minette Walters that are included (*NPNP 1*: 58-59; *Catch 10*: 23-24), but many of the other authors of crime stories have not been identified. These texts have probably been selected in order to provide students with exciting and entertaining content in chapters such as 'Fear' (*Catch* 9) and 'Monsters Are Forever' (*NPNP* 1). Especially *Flight* includes a large number of such texts, in accordance with the tendency in this textbook series to emphasize the texts' entertainment value. Common to most of the texts in this category is that they do not provide very conspicuous information about British culture and society and that they seem to aim to provide students with linguistic input in a text that is entertaining to read.

When it comes to British fairy tales, legends and myths, the English syllabus indicates that students are expected to become familiar with this part of British cultural heritage, and the legend about Robin Hood is mentioned as an example. Three of the textbook series follow up the syllabus' suggestion by informing the students about this legendary figure and also by including an excerpt from the story about him (*Search 8*: 77-80; *Catch 8*: 41-42; *NPNP 3 TG*: 66-67). In addition, the legend of King Arthur is included in two of the textbooks (*Flight 8 WB*: 119-120; *Search 9*: 36-39) and there are also stories about the Lady of Shalott and Epona the Horsewoman, a legendary

goddess from Wales (*Flight 8 TG*: 34; *NPNP 1*: 136). Part of the intention with these texts is probably to provide students with some knowledge about British folklore and folk traditions. But some fairy tales and legends are also included where the reference to the United Kingdom is only implied (eg *Flight 8*: 96). As indicated in section 6.2.4, these texts' potential for culture learning is much lower.

7.3.2 Fictional texts: The United States

Students get ample opportunity to meet and learn about the United States by way of fictional texts. As in the case of the texts that have to do with the United Kingdom, half or more than half of the prose texts that refer to the United States in three of the textbook series are fictional texts. In *Search*, the figure is somewhat lower, 45 percent (see Table 7.8).

Table 7.11 shows that, when all the textbook series are seen together, the majority of the fictional texts that have been written by American authors fall into the category 'Children's / teenage literature' (an average of 52 %). This figure is slightly higher than in the case of the British fictional texts, and there are also more American than British prose text lines that can be classified as having to do with the country's history or literary canon (38 versus 26 %, on average). While many British texts fall into the category 'Crime, mystery and entertainment', however, only a few of the American texts do the same (3 % on average). There is approximately the same number of American fairy tales, legends and myths as there are British.

Table 7.11: The distribution of different types of American fictional texts, in percent

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	AVERAGE
Canon, historical texts	.30	.44	.24	.55	.38
Children's / teenage literature	.56	.48	.65	.39	.52
Crime, mystery, entertainment	.08	.00	.02	.02	.03
Fairy tales, legends, myths	.06	.08	.09	.04	.07
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The selection of American fiction and British fiction differ in several ways. Despite the fact that more American than British prose text lines are classified as belonging to the category 'Canon, historical texts', less importance seems to be attached to familiarizing the students with American literary canon than with British. Many of the

texts that fall into this category cast light on different historical issues, and relatively few texts seem to have been selected with the primary objective of providing the students with an example of high quality American fiction. An excerpt from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is included in a chapter called 'Enjoy a Classic!' (*NPNP 3*: 124-129), but the other texts by well-known American authors indicate that primary emphasis has been attached to finding topics that will appeal to the students' interests.

It is also worth noticing that, while there are several texts by British 19th century authors as well as some texts from even earlier times, only 20th century American literary texts have been included. The only exception is Mark Twain, who is represented with an excerpt from *Tom Sawyer* in all the textbook series (*Flight 9*: 16-21; *NPNP* 2: 166; *Search 8*: 173-175; *Catch 8*: 52-55). This text is the only example of American children's classics in the textbooks while, as indicated in section 7.3.1, more British children's classics have been included.

One explanation for the greater emphasis on British than on American literary canon in the textbooks can perhaps be found in the English syllabus in *L-97*, as many more British than American authors are mentioned here.[90] This situation may have given the textbook authors more freedom to select texts and topics that cast light on contemporary issues and that may link up with the students' own experience.

A large number of excerpts from books for teenagers are included, but even in the selection of texts by authors who are not primarily associated with this age group, considerable efforts have been made to find texts that have young people as protagonists and that take up typical teenage issues. One text that is written by Carson McCullers, for example, presents a girl who thinks she is growing up to be too tall, while a text by Alice Walker is about a mother who worries about her daughter's smoking (*Catch 9*: 106-107; *Catch 10*: 88-93).

There are many other examples as well. A text by John Steinbeck is about a father and a son who are watching and discussing a movie, and a text by Langston Hughes describes a boy who tries to steal money so that he can buy himself a pair of new shoes (*Flight 9*: 129-133; *NPNP 2*: 92-95). A text by Ernest Hemingway, which is

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[90] For the lower secondary level, the English syllabus suggests American fictional texts only by Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and Mark Twain.

presented both in *New People, New Places* and in *Catch,* also has a young boy as its protagonist (*NPNP 2*: 172-176; *Catch 9*: 151-155).

The excerpts from the teenage books present a variety of people and, although fictional texts present fictional characters, many of the youngsters portrayed in the texts will probably come across to the readers as 'real' people and believable representatives of American society. In addition to many texts that involve white Americans, there are quite a few texts that have members of ethnic minorities as protagonists. In 'To Walk the Sky Path', students get some insight into the life of a young Native American, as he balances his life between the values of his Seminole tribe and those of mainstream American society (*Flight 9*: 39-43). 'Becoming American' is told by a young Chinese American and focuses on the recent immigrants' difficulties in finding their own identity in American society (*Flight 9 WB*: 66-67).

Some texts have African-American protagonists but, as mentioned in section 6.2.3, this is not pointed out to the students. This applies both to the text by Langston Hughes and the one by Toni Cade Bambara (*NPNP 2*: 92-95; ibid: 202-207). Obviously, more learning and reflection could have been the result if some of the culture-specific traits that these texts illustrate had been highlighted and explained to the students.

The fictional texts deal with a number of different topics, and provide much information about contemporary American society and also about some American teenagers' situation, language, behavior and state of mind. Three texts written by Danziger, Caldwell and Keillor, for example, describe the ordeals of setting up a date and coping with a relationship (*Flight 10 WB*: 19-20; *Search 9*: 200-203; *NPNP 3*: 216-219). 'Nothing but the truth' tells the story of Philip who loses his place on the track team because of his D in English, while 'And summer's gone' describes the breakdown of a friendship (*Catch 10*: 121-128; *Catch 10*: 144-151). In addition to the personal stories that these texts present, the reader gets considerable insight into the American school system and the ways in which young American people relate to one another.

Some texts deal with more serious problems. The text by Langston Hughes about the young thief has already been mentioned, and a text by Susan Hinton is about

a young man who calls the police when he finds out that his foster brother is a drug dealer (*NPNP 2*: 198-201). Thus, it can be argued that, while earlier textbooks have been criticized for presenting a one-sided, superficial and idyllic picture of the foreign country, the fictional texts by American authors that have been included in today's textbooks can be said to provide the users of these books with a more varied and balanced description of American society.

Still, there is a main focus in the fictional texts on the rather mundane concerns of the affluent white Western teenager, and the excerpts from Paula Danziger's books are good examples of this. One of the texts is a first person narrative by a girl who is dissatisfied with herself in general and her body in particular (*NPNP 2*: 116-120). Another text is about Kendra who is very worried about pimples, little brothers and a great number of imagined difficulties (*Search 9*: 20-21). The text describes both her petty problems and her very privileged life-style (most of her worries are linked to her forthcoming vacation from New York to London).

These texts describe American teenagers, but the exercise material fails to point out the culture-specific traits that the texts illustrate. Whenever questions and exercises follow up the non-linguistic content of the text at all, students are asked to reflect on it only with reference to their own understanding and experience, as shown in the question that is attached to the text about Kendra:

> Many people worry about what might happen to them or to their family
> or friends. Others seem not to care at all about the future. What about
> you? Are you a worrier like Kendra? (*Search 9*: 21)

In focusing primarily on aspects of the text that the students are already familiar with, it can be argued that the exercises and activities contribute to reducing rather than opening up the texts for the students. Moreover, in assuming that the protagonists of the texts and the students share the same experience, worries and concerns, the exercise material can be said to promote the notion of the 'universal' universe based on Western lifestyles and perspectives mentioned in sections 2.4.6 and 3.1.2.

When it comes to the historical texts, efforts have been made to present aspects of American history through the eyes of young people. Most of the texts present some of the historical background of different ethnic groups, and there is a primary focus on

African-Americans and Native Americans. Two textbooks include excerpts from *The Sign of the Beaver*, which is a book about the friendship between a white settler boy and a young Native American (*Flight 9 WB*: 37-39: *Catch 9*: 55-59). One text describes racial discrimination in the American South in the 1930s as it is experienced by a black girl, while 'Freedom Crossing' provides insight into the era of slavery as it is told by a young girl who is involved in the 'Underground Railroad' (*Flight 9 WB*: 108-110; *Search 10*: 161-165).

Immigration is also a topic that is well covered in the fictional texts and here, too, the stories are told from a young person's perspective. Excerpts from many well-known books are presented, such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, which describes the hardships of the children in an Irish family in New York, and Karen Hesse's *Letters from Rifka*, which relates the story of a young Russian Jew as she arrives on Ellis Island (*New People, New Places 2*: 44-46; *Flight 9*: 79-83; *Search 10*: 258-259).

Most of these texts are presented in chapters that also include other, more information-focused texts about the same topic. The idea seems to be to let the different texts complement each other and contribute to a broader and more complete picture. While the information-focused texts provide necessary background information, the fictional texts offer a personal – and probably more motivating – perspective on an issue.

Another example of this can be seen in the presentation of American myths and legends in the textbook series. These texts are all taken from Native American and African-American folk tradition, and quite a few of them are presented together with other texts in chapters such as 'The Way West' and 'The African Link'. In this way, the myths and legends contribute to the chapters' presentation of Native American and African-American culture (*NPNP 2 TG*: 82-83; ibid: 85-86; *Search 9*: 146-148; *Search 9 TG*: 80). Some Native American myths, however, are included in chapters that present similar texts from other parts of the world, and the fact that the myths represent Native American cultural heritage is not emphasized. This strategy must be said to reduce the information value of the texts a great deal when it comes to providing students with insight into a specific country or culture (eg *Catch 9*: 197; *Search 8*: 76-77).

7.3.3 Fictional texts: Other countries

Although the English syllabus in *L-97* focuses almost exclusively on fictional texts by British and American authors, the textbook series include fictional texts from many other countries as well. There are texts from Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand and South Africa, in addition to some countries outside the English-speaking world. While 32 percent of the total body of fictional texts have been written by British and 31 percent by American authors, 20 percent of the fictional texts have been written by authors from other countries (see Table 7.3).

Many different types of texts are included. One concern has, apparently, been to expose students to parts of the foreign country's literary canon. One of the few Canadian texts that have been selected is an example of this, namely Margaret Atwood's 'Caught in a Viscious Circle'.[91] It is presented in the chapter 'Enjoy a Classic' in *New People, New Places* and the author is presented as one of Canada's most famous writers (*NPNP 3*: 132). Another example is a text from Australia, 'The babes in the wood', which is introduced as one of the classics in Australian literature, a text that every Australian child knows about (*Catch 10*: 208).

In accordance with the suggestions for eighth grade in *L-97*, all the four eighth grade books include an excerpt from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and, together, these excerpts can be said to illustrate the very different ways in which high quality literature is presented and dealt with in the textbooks.

As in the case of most fictional texts, all textbook series include some biographical information about the author. In *Flight*, the text is part of a chapter about Ireland and Scotland, and the central position of Jonathan Swift and *Gulliver's Travels* in Irish literature is underlined. In the other textbook series, the excerpts are included in chapters that have to do with travel (*Catch* and *Search*) and monsters (*New People, New Places*), apparent attempts to make a link between Swift's text and the students' own interests. This can be seen particularly clearly in *Catch*, where the only activity that follows the text asks the students to 'give a mini-talk about a place you want to go

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[91] The title of this text is misprinted both in the table of contents and in the heading of the text (*NPNP 3*: 7; *NPNP 3*: 132). See note 67, section 6.3.2.

to. Give reasons for your choice – explaining to your classmates what's so special about the place' (*Catch 8*: 188).

One of the few exercises that follow up and reinforce the information that is provided about an author and his or her work can be found in *Flight,* where a series of questions ask students to practice the genitive s on the basis of sentences like these: '*Gulliver's Travels* is read all over the world. It's Swift's most famous book' (*Flight 8 WB*: 179). The exercise can be said to provide an interesting example of how even a language practice activity can signal to the students that 'Jonathan Swift' and '*Gulliver's Travels*' are names worth remembering. On the other hand, voices could certainly be raised in favor of communicating this message in a more explicit and direct way.

The excerpt from *Gulliver's Travels* itself is used primarily as the starting point for work with the students' language skills. A series of comprehension questions in *Flight* and *New People, New Places* ask students to recapitulate details from the story, while an exercise in *Search* encourages close reading of the text in order to write the story from one of the giants' point of view. In *New People, New Places*, students are asked to 'Write a story about a monster. Use as many adjectives as you can' (*NPNP 1*: 65).

In this way, Swift's text exemplifies how high quality texts are used, first and foremost, to provide students with linguistic input and to function as a starting point for language practice activities. No great importance seems to be attached to the information that is provided about the author (and the text), and very little is done to draw the students' attention to the literary qualities of the texts. On the contrary, efforts seem sometimes to have been made to under-communicate the status that the different texts have in world literature, and the relevance that the texts may have for the students' own experience is stressed instead.

Trying to help students relate a fictional text to their own contexts is, of course, a worthy endeavor. Still, there seems to be no reason to conceal the fact that Swift's text is a very famous one, since this may signal to the students that they are not expected to find information about famous authors and their work very interesting. A different approach could be to ask the students to express their personal reactions to

the texts and the information presented and encourage them to reflect on the relevance that the material might have for them.[92]

Quite a few texts link up with the countries' folk traditions, and Irish literary heritage is given special attention. Thus, many traditional Irish songs and folk tales are included, as well as a number of limericks (*Flight 8*: 156-157; *Search 9*: 120-121; *Catch 10*: 213). There are also quite a few myths and legends from Australia and New Zealand and, since they are presented alongside information-focused texts, they can be said to provide valuable contributions to the total picture that is given of the country or culture in question.

Other fictional texts present information about contemporary issues in the foreign country, and many texts provide encounters with people as well as insight into their everyday lives. In the presentation of Australia, for example, one fictional text provides an impression of the frequent bushfires there, while another text describes the traditional lifestyle and values of an Aboriginal tribe (*NPNP 1*: 196-201; *Flight 10 WB*: 70-72). As mentioned in section 7.2.5, fictional texts also have a central position in the presentation of South Africa in *Catch* and *New People, New Places*. An excerpt from the teenage novel *Go Well, Stay Well* may be particularly appropriate for the readers, as it describes the problems for a black and a white girl to maintain their friendship during the apartheid era.[93]

Texts such as these can be said to indicate the value of fictional texts when it comes to providing students with insight into foreign cultures. At the same time, there is reason to remember that, not least in connection with texts that are set in cultures that differ considerably from the students' own, background information will most often be needed in order for students to be able to understand the content of the texts and to meet the texts with an open mind.

One of the fictional texts that are set in India illustrates the challenges that may be related to such texts. 'Jasmine' is about a young couple's love relationship, and it gives some insights into the community in which they live and the social rules that apply there. But the text provides few clues that can explain why members of a

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[92] This point is followed up in section 10.2.2.
[93] The novel is, erroneously, identified in *Catch* as *Stay Well, Live Well* (*Catch 10*: 54).

militant Sikh sect attack the couple and murder Jasmine's husband. No explanation is given in commentaries to the text either, and the situation may, at best, puzzle the readers (*NPNP 3*: 96-100). Without the necessary background information, then, it seems that texts such as this one may run the risk of strengthening rather than counteracting any negative views that the students might have of people in foreign countries.

Quite a few fictional texts describe cultural encounters and will probably be well suited as a starting point for activities that aim to encourage the students' intercultural learning. These texts are discussed in more detail in section 9.2, and I will therefore mention only one of them here. The text 'A Horse and Two Goats' describes the meeting between an Indian farmer and an American tourist. Because of the lack of understanding between the two, the American drives away with a statue that is believed to protect the village. The text illustrates both the possible consequences of a tourist's lack of consideration for the local culture and the central role that language skills play in situations of intercultural contact. An exercise that follows the text provides an example of how a fictional text can be used as the basis for valuable reflection on cultural questions and intercultural challenges:

> *A Horse and Two Goats* is about a misunderstanding between two people. Talk in your group about why this misunderstanding happened (*NPNP* 3: 89).

The textbooks contain some fictional texts that represent countries outside the English-speaking world as well. While such texts could exemplify the ways in which English, as an international language, can be used to relate stories from any corner of the world, this is not the function that they have been given in present-day textbooks. Rather, the texts have been selected in order to cast light on the topic of the chapter and there is, for example, a Danish fairy tale in a chapter that deals with Christmas and a Norse myth in a chapter about the Holy Island of Lindisfarne and the Vikings (*Catch 9*: 96-98; *Search 8 TG*: 116-117).

7.3.4 Fictional texts: Summary and discussion

In accordance with the *L-97* requirements, all the four textbook series include a considerable number of fictional texts, and practically all chapters include a piece of

fiction. In all the textbook series, there is a predominance of fictional texts by British and American authors, but many texts from other English-speaking countries – as well as from other parts of the world - have also been included. Thus, the textbooks expand the scope of authors and texts suggested in the English syllabus in *L-97* and this seems to be done, first and foremost, in order to indicate to the students that English is used in many different countries, all over the world.

A great variety of texts have been selected, and many different objectives seem to be linked to them. A majority of the texts are excerpts from children's and teenager's literature and the intention is, obviously, to appeal to the students' interests and to link up with the students' own experience. Quite a few of these texts are presented together with fact-oriented texts and they provide valuable extra information about a variety of issues, from a personal perspective. Many texts appear to have been chosen in order to expose the students to parts of the different countries' cultural heritage, both with respect to the countries' literary canon and their folk traditions. Other texts seem to have been selected primarily in order to fit in with the topic of the chapter, and to provide an element of entertainment.

The main function of the fictional texts, however, is to constitute a starting point for the students' work with the language. This can be seen in the fact that the exercises and activities that are attached to the texts focus, first and foremost, on the development of the students' language skills. However, as pointed out in section 6.3, there is no reason why this obvious concern in a foreign language textbook should exclude a focus on other aspects of a text. The fictional texts that are included in the textbooks investigated indicate clearly how such texts also represent a valuable resource for many other types of learning.

One important characteristic of fictional texts is that they present 'believable' representatives of the foreign countries, often in everyday situations. In fact, most of the texts in present-day textbooks that meet Risager's (1991) call for 'real' people to be presented in 'micro level texts' are fictional texts. Thus, if these texts are explored and worked with, they can probably contribute considerably to the development of the students' knowledge about people in other countries as well as to the development of their attitudes towards them.

At the same time it is worth mentioning that quite a few of the fictional texts in today's textbooks are problematic in the way that they cannot be said to present a foreign country at all. The reference seems to be to a generally western universe and, especially in some texts that have to do with teenage issues, the understanding is conveyed that youngsters are, essentially, the same all over the world. Although the focus on things that young people in different countries have in common may be an interesting one, these texts must be said to indicate a need for future textbooks to emphasize the presentation of cultural diversity and to avoid conveying the impression that 'Western' ways of experiencing and looking at the world are universally valid.

Another important characteristic of fictional texts is that they probably appeal to the students' emotional involvement to a much greater extent than information-focused texts do. The textbooks investigated can be said to indicate a fruitful approach to the presentation of cultural material when they, often, juxtapose non-fictional and fictional texts. While factual information is presented in the former, the latter show some of the human consequences of the topic that is presented. One example of this effect can be seen in *New People, New Places*, where a text that presents the historical background for the conflict in Northern Ireland is followed by a fictional text about the problematic love relationship between a Catholic boy and a Protestant girl in Belfast (*NPNP* 2: 18-20).

As indicated in section 6.1.2, the authors of *Catch* say in the teacher's guides that foreign cultures can be seen and understood in works of fiction. The implication of their statement seems to be that readers need no help in order to discover and understand expressions of culture in the texts, and it is a prevalent strategy in all the textbooks to let the texts speak for themselves. However, it seems obvious that the learning potential of fictional texts could have been exploited better, if practical strategies had been suggested for ways to explore and discover the information that they convey.

Most of the exercises in present-day textbooks that address the non-linguistic content of fictional texts are attached to texts that have to do with historical issues. Comprehension questions are used most frequently, but some examples of other

approaches can also be given.[94] In connection with a text about a young immigrant to the United States (*Letters from Rifka*, see section 7.3.2), the workbook suggests a role play that will help students understand and relate to the information that the texts provide (*Flight 9 WB*: 61). An exercise that is attached to the excerpt from *Angela's Ashes* indicates how a fictional text can be used as a starting point - and probably a motivation factor - for project work:

> The story takes place in the 1930s. During this time many Americans were out of work because there were not enough jobs. As a result, many people became very poor. In history books, this period is usually called The Great Depression. Use reference books, E-mail, the Internet or CD-ROM and find out more about the Depression. Take notes of your findings (*NPNP 2*: 50).

Many 'classics' are included in the textbooks, and there are excerpts from works by Shakespeare, Swift and Steinbeck, to mention but a few. The intention of making students familiar with some of the 'big' names in world literature is obvious, and information is provided about all the best known authors. However, as indicated in previous sections, the importance of this information seems to be reduced by the fact that it is not followed up in questions and exercises.

There are also very few exercises and activities that draw the students' attention to the literary qualities of the texts. In fact, it appears as quite a paradox that so many well-known texts and authors are represented, with the apparent intention of helping students recognize and enjoy high quality literature, when most of the texts are used simply to train reading comprehension and to develop linguistic skills. In this way, the textbooks must be said to maintain the tradition of using a 'reductive approach' to the teaching of literature (Carter 1996). One could, perhaps, even claim that we have to do with an 'abuse' of literary texts (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000).

The chapter 'Is Reading Good for You' is one of the few places in the textbooks that focuses on the fact that some texts are better than others, and that writers have many important choices to make when trying to produce an interesting fictional text (*Search 9*: 81-104). The chapter draws the students' attention to a variety of literary techniques, such as the many different ways in which an author can describe characters

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[94] An example of comprehension questions linked to a fictional text is presented in section 6.3.2.

236

and settings. In pointing out the different elements that work together in constituting a text, the chapter thus provides the students with tools that will be useful when they read other people's texts, and also when they write texts themselves.

There are sporadic references to the literary qualities of the fictional texts in the other textbook series as well. One exercise, for example, encourages close reading of a text and links this work to the development of the students' own writing:

> Read through *A Day's Wait* again to borrow good expressions for pain and illness. Use the words and expressions you picked out of *Abigail's Fall,* and read *When Adrian was ill* again to find more words you can use. Put them in your first draft to *show* how ill you felt (*Catch 9*: 156).

In order for students to be able to recognize and remember the high quality fiction that is presented, it can be argued that more information ought to be given in introductions and commentaries both about the texts and about the reasons for including them in the students' textbooks. A key point here could be the importance and the meaning that the texts have for the members of the community to which they belong (Brøgger 1992). The introduction to the chapter 'Enjoy a Classic!' indicates one way in which this can be done (*NPNP 3*: 102-141). Here, the phenomenon 'literary classic' is explained, and many different novels are mentioned. As the excerpt below shows, some information is also provided about some of the books' position in the society in question:

> Characters from literary classics can often be encountered outside the book as well. Since Lewis Carroll (1832-98) wrote Alice in Wonderland, Alice's adventures have appeared regularly on TV and in the cinema; recently she has also appeared on a new British postage stamp (*NPNP 3*: 102).

The opportunities that fictional texts provide for the students to explore many different meanings and to discuss many different interpretations are exploited, first and foremost, in *Search.* As indicated in section 6.3, *Search* includes many more 'open' questions than the other textbook series do and, rather than being asked to recapitulate details from the text (which is the usual strategy in connection with fictional texts in *Flight* and *New People, New Places*), users of *Search* are most often asked to relate

their own understanding of or reaction to aspects of the text. This can be seen in an exercise that is attached to the legend about Robin Hood:

a Describe the main characters in the story.
b Robin Hood is usually seen as a hero. What makes him a hero in your opinion? (*Search 8*: 80)

Even in the chapter mentioned above that draws the students' attention to the literary qualities of texts that have been written by accomplished writers, it is made very clear that the students themselves need to decide what it is that makes a text good reading for them. A common question is 'Pick out the description that you like best and explain why' (*Search* 9: 88).

7.4 Other cultural material

7.4.1 Poetry

The poetry that is included in the textbook series can be said to serve quite different purposes. Most of the poems are easy and straightforward texts that seem to aim, first and foremost, to motivate and to entertain the students. All the textbook series include ample amounts of light verse, such as this:

Pussy pussy puddle cat
what do you think you're
playing at
making puddles
on the mat
chairs and tables
don't do that! (*NPNP 1*: 109)

Roger McGough, the poet, is represented with a large number of similar poems. Most often, poems like this one are presented without any further comments, and cannot be said to provide insight into or experience with any specific foreign culture. The majority of them appear most of all as 'fillers' of a page and a break from the students' work with the other texts.

But all the textbook series include poetry that represents the foreign countries' literary canon, too. Most of these poems have been selected in order to fit in with the topic of the chapter. 'To a Squirrel' by W.B.Yeats and 'Little Lamb' by William Blake, for example, are included in a chapter about animals (*Catch 8*: 124), and

'Oliphaunt' by J.R.R. Tolkien and 'The Tyger' by William Blake are presented under the heading 'Wildlife' in a chapter about India (*Search 9*: 222-223). Robert Burns' 'My love is like a red, red rose' is included in a chapter about love and friendship, and two poems by Langston Hughes are included in the chapter 'Living together' (*Catch 10*: 154; ibid: 43-44).

The ways in which these poems – and the poets – are presented vary quite a bit. Sometimes, the textbooks present poems and poets quite explicitly as representing the foreign country's literary canon. In *Flight*, for example, two poems by Robert Burns and Robert Frost are included in the chapters about Scotland and the USA, and Burns and Frost are described as central poets in their respective countries (*Flight 8*: 165; *Flight 9*: 169).

On other occasions, introductions or brief texts in the margin inform the students about the poet, and extra information is also sometimes included in the teacher's guides. In *Search,* extensive information is provided about practically all the many poets who are represented in the textbooks. Here, no attempt is made to distinguish between those poets who occupy a central position in world literature and those who do not, and the decision of what information to pass on to the students is left to the teachers. This, then, is an example of how a textbook can offer materials in such a way that teachers and students need to be active in the selection process. At the same time, the approach could be said to signal that little importance is attached to providing students with information about 'big C Culture'.

On yet other occasions, nothing is made of the fact that the poems included have been written by some of the most accomplished poets in the world. The poems by Yeats and Blake which were mentioned above, for example, appear simply as two in a series of eleven poems about animals, most of which are typical examples of light verse. Nothing is said in the textbook or the teacher's guides about these two poets' status in the foreign countries' literary canon or about the literary quality of the poems.

Such a strategy can, perhaps, be said to reflect the English syllabus in *L*-97 when it states that students are to 'explore' and 'work with' a wide selection of texts. The syllabus mentions poetry by many well-known poets, but nothing is said about the need for students to learn about these poets and their position in world literature.

Although it would be natural to think that high quality poetry is recommended in order for students to be helped to develop the ability to recognize and appreciate literary quality, no mention is made that this is supposed to happen.

Search presents more poetry than the other textbook series do, and many of the poems add much to the information that is provided in the other texts. Examples of such poems can be seen in the section 'What happened to Native American culture?' and in the chapters 'Imagining India' and 'Voices of Africa' (*Search 9*: 142-145; ibid: 208-209; *Search 10*: 70-72). Many different exercises are given that draw the students' attention to the cultural value of the texts and encourage them to work further with the information that they provide. The tasks below, for example, are attached to two of the poems that have to do with conditions in South Africa:

> What are *The Black Badge of Africa* and *The Rainbow Nation* really
> about? Write an analysis of the poems and explain the titles as you
> understand them (*Search 10*: 72).

In the other textbook series, there are much fewer poems that cast light on aspects of the foreign country, and those that do are rarely followed up in commentaries, questions and exercises. Most of the exercise material that is included has a linguistic focus only, and the culture-specific references in the poems are most often overlooked.

One rather extreme example of valuable cultural information that is not brought to the students' attention can be found in a poem in *Catch*. 'But you didn't' is written by an American high school student who tells the story of her boyfriend who went to the war in Vietnam and never came back. The exercise that follows this poem focuses neither on the meaning of the poem nor on the students' reactions to it. Instead, students are simply asked to write down the last stanza as part of a listening comprehension exercise (*Catch 10*: 168).

The example above from *Search* also indicates the tendency in this textbook series - which was mentioned in connection with the fictional texts - to encourage students to provide their own interpretation of texts. This strategy is used to a much lesser degree in the other textbook series, but it is worth noticing that *New People, New Places* argues for it in a section called 'Understanding poetry' in the back of the textbook for tenth grade (*NPNP 3*: 308-313). Here, the authors refer to the ambiguity

of a poem and state that poetry therefore represents a unique opportunity for students to voice their own opinions and to formulate their own understanding of the texts that they work with. As argued in section 3.6.2, such a strategy seems to open for the students' personal involvement with the texts and, thus, for increased possibilities for learning and new insight.[95]

The poetry that is included in present-day textbooks indicates that poems can be selected, presented and worked with in order to serve many different purposes. First of all, poetry can provide students with creative and motivating examples of language which, because of the figurative language and ambiguous meanings that many poems have, may function particularly well as the starting point for the learners' discussions of different interpretations. Secondly, poems can be included in order to provide students with insight into foreign cultures and also into parts of foreign countries' literary canon. Last, but not least, they can represent encounters and experiences with high quality literature. However, the textbooks also illustrate the tendency to disregard the potential for learning that poetry represents in the way that very few commentaries and exercises encourage students to work both with the meanings and the uses of language that the poems exemplify.

7.4.2 Songs

The textbook series contain a large number of songs that provide encounters with many different aspects of other cultures. Most of the songs are from the United Kingdom and the United States, but there are also songs from other parts of the English-speaking world. A great variety of songs from different genres and epochs are included. There are modern songs from the rock scene, protest songs from the sixties and seventies, evergreens, excerpts from musicals, and jazz melodies. All textbook series also include a great number of traditional songs, such as folk songs from different countries, Negro Spirituals and Christmas carols.

As in the case of the poetry that is included, there are great variations in the degree to which and the ways in which the songs are exploited for culture learning. It can, of course, be debated how much information and how many exercises one should

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[95] This perspective is followed up in section 10.2.2.

attach to a song, and voices could certainly be raised in favor of focusing primarily on a song's aesthetic value. At the same time, some songs can provide considerable insight into a foreign culture, and it would seem a pity if this was not pointed out to the students. Also, some song lyrics may be quite difficult to understand. Thus, both from a language and a culture learning perspective there seems to be good reason to focus on some of the words and the cultural references that they contain.

Many songs have, clearly, been selected in order to familiarize students with some of the best-known songs in the countries that are presented. Thus, in the chapters that have to do with Australia, all four textbook series include either 'Waltzing Matilda' or 'Tie me kangaroo down, sport', and 'Cockles and Mussels' and 'Tri-Coloured Ribbon' are presented in two chapters about Ireland (*NPNP 2*: 16; *Search 9*: 111). However, while *New People, New Places* presents 'Waltzing Matilda' without any explanatory comments, *Catch* and *Search* explain difficult words such as 'swagman' and 'billabong' and, in the teacher's guides, substantial information is provided both about the content of the song and about its position in Australian society (*Catch 10 TG*: 124; *Search 8 TG*: 111).

Songs can also add much to the presentation of a country's history. The ways in which *New People, New Places* includes songs in its presentation of American history can serve as a good example of this. In connection with songs like 'Oh, Susanna!' and 'Billy Boy', for example, students are informed in separate texts both about the songs' historical context and about the role that they have played in society (*NPNP 2*: 105; ibid: 139). Both traditional and more recent songs are commented upon. The text below accompanies Bob Dylan's 'Blowing in the Wind':

> Songs of protest have played a part in American life for many years. They express people's feeling about something they think is wrong. Bob Dylan's protest songs are all very famous. This is one of his earliest. It is about war. In the 1960s many young people protested against the war in Vietnam (*NPNP 2*: 61).

But there are other aspects of songs that can be exploited for culture learning as well, and *Search* points to quite a few of them. The teacher's guides in this series provide large amounts of information about the song-writers and the artists as well as the

recordings. When the recording shows an artist who is different from the one who is usually associated with the song, there is even information about the alternative artist.

Search presents many more original recordings of songs than the other textbook series do. In addition to many original recordings from the contemporary folk- and rock scene, there is also a recording of 'Pomp and Circumstances' from the Royal Albert Hall, complete with bells and whistles. An accompanying text describes the song and the way it is performed as an expression of British patriotism (*Search 8*: 15).

Information is provided in the teacher's guides whenever a song, for copyright reasons, is not presented in the original version. In this way, the teacher's attention is drawn to the fact that original recordings carry meaning that is lost if the song is recorded anew for the textbook series. To overcome this problem, teachers are sometimes encouraged to check the students' and their colleagues' collections, so that the original recording can be brought to the classroom (eg *Search 9 TG*: 52).

Since so many of the songs provide much valuable input both in terms of language and culture learning, it seems a pity that only a few exercises are attached to the songs. Sometimes, songs are used as the basis for listening comprehension. After having listened to Bob Dylan's 'With God on Our Side' and Tom Lehrer's 'National Brotherhood Week', for example, students are asked to fill in some missing words and to put the stanzas in the correct order (*Catch 10*: 160-161). *Catch* 9 provides a rare example of how the informational and cultural value of song lyrics can be exploited, in an exercise attached to the song 'Why Can't the English Learn to Speak' from *My Fair Lady*:

> Discuss in groups what you think the main message of the song is.
> Professor Higgins thinks:
> - everyone should speak standard English
> - you can tell which social class people belong to by the way they speak
> - that the school system doesn't teach the English language properly
> (*Catch 9*: 125).

7.4.3 Illustrations

All four textbooks contain many illustrations that add considerably to the texts' presentation of foreign cultures. Many different types of illustrations are used. *New*

People, New Places has the largest number of color photographs, while both *Search* and *Catch* present many paintings.

Most of the photographs show landscapes, city scenes or people who are seen from far away, and there are relatively few photographs that show people close-up. According to Kress & Leeuwen (1996), this could indicate to the students that the scene depicted is there for contemplation only, and that it is rather difficult to get in contact with.

At the same time, it is obvious that such photographs can be made the starting point for much cultural learning, particularly if they are equipped with explanatory captions and followed up in exercises that encourage students to investigate and work with the illustrations. In the textbooks investigated, this effect could have been exploited more. In *Flight* and *Catch*, for example, many photographs appear without any explanatory comments, and one can only assume that the illustration is from the country or the city that is mentioned in the text next to it.

In *New People, New Places*, on the other hand, virtually all the photographs have information attached to them. In this textbook series, all chapters are introduced by a two-page collage of pictures with captions that, for the most part, focus on different aspects of a foreign culture and add considerably to the cultural information provided in the rest of the book. The presentations of British and American schools are good examples of this (*NPNP 1*: 145; *NPNP 2*: 96-97).

Very few exercises are attached directly to the illustrations. In *Search¸* however, a four-page section in the teacher's guide for eight grade presents a variety of activities that can be linked to pictures - both the ones included in the textbooks and others. Some comments are related directly to the individual photographs and paintings in the textbooks:

> The photograph on page 110 shows 'the heart' of London: Piccadilly
> Circus and the Eros statue (on top of the fountain to the right). We can
> see, just barely, a traditional 'black cab' in the left part of the picture and
> a red cab behind the buses. The street straight ahead is *Shaftesbury*
> *Avenue,* which goes through London's theater- and entertainment area,
> *Soho*. It would be a good idea to let the students study the photograph
> carefully. Maybe they can find something that they know and can say

something about? McDonald's is one thing that should be obvious! (*Search 8 TG*: 80*).

Other illustrations, such as maps and diagrams, are sometimes used in order to add to the information that is provided in the texts. In the presentation of Australia, for example, *Search* includes a map that shows how big Australia is compared to Europe, and a diagram that shows the average temperatures in different parts of the country (*Search 8*: 183; ibid: 185). Occasionally, everyday artifacts such as newspaper clippings and theater tickets contribute to linking the textbook materials to the 'real' world. *Catch* indicates how substantial information about the beaches in Australia can be provided by way of photographs of signs that meet visitors there (*Catch 10*: 202; ibid: 207).

Only a few of these 'authentic' materials are commented upon and exploited in terms of classroom work, but *Catch* indicates one way in which such materials can be used. In a chapter about the United States, students are given the following exercise:

> 14-year-old Sara from Norway has lived for a year in San Diego, California. She is now driving across the United States with her parents and her 10-year-old brother, John. Look at the tickets, brochures and other souvenirs on these pages, and find out some of the things Sara and her family did while they were in the Four Corner area.
> Example: They visited the Mesa Verde National Park (*Catch 8*: 166).

Catch and *Search* include many reproductions of paintings; in *Search* as many as 49 paintings are presented. Many of them date back to the 19th century, and there are even some from the 15th and 16th centuries. Most of the paintings in *Search* and *Catch* are by artists from the English-speaking world, but there are also some from other countries – including two paintings in *Search* and four paintings in *Catch* by Norwegian artists.

The English syllabus in *L-97* calls for students to be exposed to 'pictures' and 'art' in their work with English, but it does not mention the need for students to familiarize themselves with well-known painters or paintings. The document *L-97* itself, however, is illustrated by way of a large number of such reproductions. Thus, the strategy used in *Catch* may be a response to this, as most of the paintings seem to be included merely to illustrate a topic.

In *Search,* on the other hand, the paintings appear to be part of the textbook series' efforts to contribute to the students' general education. Here, extensive information is provided in the teacher's guides both about the painters and the paintings and some classroom activities are also suggested. Teachers are, for example, encouraged to let students scrutinize a painting of Queen Elizabeth I in terms of its information value (*Search 9 TG*: 39).

Often in *Search,* however, the cultural value of the illustrations is not brought to the students' attention. One example of this can be seen in *Search 9*, where the front page of the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* is shown. The teacher's guide provides extensive explanations of the headlines, pictures and texts on the page, and encourages discussions in the classroom as to what the front page of a newspaper ought to look like (*Search 9 TG*: 83). Thus, *The Sun* is not focused on in terms of the information that it provides about British society, rather it is discussed as an example of tabloids in general. This is one of many instances where *Search* follows up the content of a text or an illustration only in general terms and does not use it as a basis for work with culture-specific issues.

Most of the people who are portrayed in close-up photographs are famous people such as authors, painters, historic persons and contemporary rock stars. In *New People, New Places*, there are more than fifty portraits of well-known people. Pictures of 'normal' people in everyday situations that could tell the students something about everyday life in the foreign countries, on the other hand, are lacking in all four textbook series.

However, as mentioned in section 7.2, some of the monologues where youngsters tell about their own experience are accompanied by snapshots of the people who are talking. Although most of these texts are very brief and provide only basic facts about those involved, the photographs seem to 'demand contact' with the reader and thus contribute to making the persons come across as 'real' representatives of the foreign country.

All textbook series illustrate how illustrations can be given a central position in the presentation of foreign cultures. This happens in sections that aim to provide students with information about places such as London, Australia, Ireland, Malta and

the United States (*Flight 8*: 48-49; *Catch 8*: 111-113; *Search 8*: 180; *Search 9*: 106-107: *Search 10*: 134-135; *Search 10*: 6-7; *Flight 9*: 156-161). The sections consist of a series of texts and photographs, and the students' task is to match the pictures and the texts that belong together. Thus, these exercises force the students to be attentive to the information that both texts and photographs convey

7.4.4 Extra material in the teacher's guides

All the teacher's guides provide some extra cultural material, mainly in the form of informational texts that are directly related to the texts and exercises in the students' books. Both the content and the format of this extra information vary significantly in the four textbook series.

In *Flight,* there are several pages with extra background information for almost every chapter. The texts provide in-depth information about the general topic of the chapter, such as different holidays and traditions in the United Kingdom and major cities in the United States (*Flight 8 TG*: 66-68; *Flight 9 TG*: 189-196). Since many of the texts are several pages long and the language is quite advanced, this material will probably be most suitable as extra information for the teacher.

At the same time, one can sometimes wonder how useful these texts will be. First of all, many topics seem to have been picked at random. In connection with a chapter that presents different American sports, for example, teachers get a thorough description of the baseball game, while the other issues that the chapter deals with are not mentioned at all (*Flight 9 TG*: 78-80). One can also wonder why most topics are presented from a historical perspective. This applies to the presentation of baseball and also to the presentation of topics such as British and American crime fiction and customs related to wedding dresses and rings (*Flight 10 TG*: 59-60; ibid: 40-41).

In the other textbook series, short texts are often related directly to the texts, exercises and illustrations in the textbooks. Quite a few of these texts lend themselves easily to presentation in the classroom, although this is not pointed out to the teachers. In *New People, New Places* there are some framed boxes labeled 'information' that seem particularly well suited as extra texts for some of the students. Some of these texts, however, are written in Norwegian, and it is unclear why information about

some authors, texts and geographical regions is given in Norwegian rather than in English.

All four textbooks leave it up to the teacher whether or not – and in which ways – the extra information in the teacher's guides should be used. It is thus unclear whether the texts are included primarily to answer the teacher's potential questions, or whether the intention is to expose the students to all – or some of - the extra material. The question related to the possible uses of the extra material seems especially relevant in the case of *Search*. This textbook series provides such an abundance of background information related to all parts of the textbook content that it may in fact be quite a demanding task for the teacher to sort out the most central issues for presentation.

Nevertheless, the teacher's guides show that much valuable background information can be provided here, both as support for the teacher and as possible extra material and input for the students. It seems obvious, however, that the extra material could be even more valuable if its intended purpose had been signalled more explicitly, and if the organization and presentation of the material had corresponded to these intentions.

7.4.5 Other cultural material: Summary and discussion

The poetry that is presented in the textbooks consists, first and foremost, of 'light verse' that has no specific cultural reference, but some poems that provide information about the foreign culture and some examples of the different foreign countries' literary canon are also included. Very different approaches are used when it comes to the ways in which the poems are introduced and followed up in the textbooks. What is clear, however, is that poetry can be a valuable source for culture learning, provided that commentaries and exercises draw the students' attention to cultural aspects of the poems and also to the meaning that the poems – and the poets - may have for the members of the foreign culture. Some of the exercises in present-day textbooks point to the fact that many poems are ambiguous and can thus function particularly well as the starting point for the students' own, independent reflection on the meaning of a text.

The textbook series include a large number of songs from different genres and epochs, particularly from the United Kingdom and the United States. As in the case of the poetry, there are great variations in the degree to which the considerable material that the songs represent are used for culture learning. *Search* provides much more information about all aspects of the songs and their contexts than the other textbook series do. This information is presented in the teachers' guides and indicates that, if it is passed on to the students, much valuable culture learning can result from the students' work with songs.

The textbooks contain many different illustrations, such as color photographs of landscapes and city scenes. There are many portraits of famous people, but few pictures of ordinary people in everyday situations that could give students an impression of everyday life in the foreign countries. In *Search* and *Catch* there are many reproductions of paintings, apparently with the intention of exposinging students to examples of 'high culture'. There is great variation in the degree to which information is provided about the illustrations, and whether or not they are followed up in questions and exercises. Many illustrations appear only as fillers on a page, and there seems to be much unexploited potential for culture learning here.

Search is the textbook series that attaches most importance to providing the teachers (and, possibly the students) with extra background information in the teacher's guides. Here, systematic and extensive information is provided about texts, topics, authors and illustrations. In the other series' teachers' guides extra information is also provided, but some of it seems rather arbitrarily chosen and its intended purpose is not always clear.

8 The presentation of English and English language use

As the English syllabus in *L*-97 points out, Norwegian students need to learn English, first and foremost, as a language for international communication. Thus, in order for them to be able to use English in a variety of different settings, in encounters with people from a range of different countries they would, obviously, benefit from being exposed to some of the great diversity of the language. This chapter looks into the degree to which and the ways in which present-day textbooks do this, at the same time as it points to some issues that can be addressed when preparing for work with varieties of English in textbooks in the future. Section 8.1.1 looks at the texts that have to do with the global spread of English, while sections 8.1.2 and 8.1.3 investigate the presentation of different accents and dialects.[96] Section 8.1.4 discusses the issue of native versus non-native varieties of English as it manifests itself in the textbook series.

The second part of this chapter looks at the question of appropriate language use and investigates the ways in which students are – and can be - helped to develop their socio-linguistic skills. Section 8.2.1 describes some of the work that is done with language functions in the textbook series, while section 8.2.2 looks into the contexts of language use that the textbooks seem to prepare the students for. Section 8.2.3 discusses some issues related to the teaching of different discourse conventions.

8.1 The presentation of English

8.1.1 English as a world language

We have already seen that, although most of the texts for reading and listening have to do with the United Kingdom and the United States, the textbook series indicate that English is spoken in many other countries as well. In addition to the chapters and texts that take the readers to different parts of the English-speaking world, there are also some sections that provide factual information about English as a world language. *New People, New Places* provides the most extensive coverage of this topic, as it is dealt with in several texts and also in a two-page collage of photographs with captions in the

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[96] For the distinction between accents, which have to do with varieties of pronunciation, and dialects, which have to do with varieties of grammar and lexis, see Hughes and Trudgill (1996).

chapter 'Our English-speaking world' (*NPNP 3*: 8-39). The main focus here is on the British Empire and the Commonwealth, and students get a great deal of information about the historical reasons for the global spread of English.

Flight and *Search* also describe the spread of English from a historical perspective. A brief introduction to the chapter 'English spoken here' informs the students that it is British emigration and colonization that has brought English to remote corners of the world. The chapter then presents texts from Canada, Bermuda, Pitcairn and the Falkland Islands but, as indicated in Chapter 7, focus is not on the fact that English is used in these places (*Flight 10*: 173).

Search 8 presents a map of the world that indicates where English is spoken today and the text that accompanies it describes how the language has developed through the ages, for example through Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking and French influence (*Search 8*: 17-19). It could be argued, however, that an equally relevant perspective could be how English influences and even suppresses other languages. A few texts touch upon these issues as they describe – very briefly - the development of 'Spanglish' and Pidgin English (*Search 10*: 20; *Flight 10*: 183).

Another text, 'English – The Global Language', indicates a different approach as it challenges the students to reflect on the role that English plays in the world today and the role that the language may play in the future:

> What will happen to English in the future? Will all the new kinds of English become one and the same? […] Will every child be multilingual – being able to speak other languages, as well as English? […] or will English become the only language that is spoken in the world? It would be a great shame if we lost all the other thousands of languages that exist today. Or would that be your idea of paradise? (*NPNP 3*: 32)

A few exercises and suggestions for project work also encourage the students to think about the position and the importance of English:

> Why do you think English is the first foreign language you learn in school? (*NPNP* 3: 9)

For Norwegian youngsters, who meet English in innumerable contexts in their everyday lives and who experience the daily influence of English on their own language, questions such as these seem highly relevant. However, in today's

textbooks, only the text 'English – The Global Language' provides answers to the questions. Here, considerable information is provided about the large number of people who speak English and the many arenas of international communication in which it is used. Thus, the text gives the students many good reasons to learn the language and it can probably also constitute a valuable starting point for the students' reflection on the importance that English and English language learning has in their own lives.

The role of English as a lingua franca, between speakers of other languages, is shown in a few dialogues. One of them points to a situation that is quite relevant for the students as it presents four teenagers from four different countries who are talking together at a summer camp in Norway (*NPNP 3*: 10-11). This, then, can be said to indicate one way in which textbooks can provide examples of situations in which students may be likely to need English language skills.

Only a couple of texts have to do with the challenges that situations of intercultural communication may involve. One of them is set in a classroom in Manchester and involves four international students who are discussing the way in which languages borrow words from one another. Some of the students use expressions that the others misunderstand, and the professor comments – with Oscar Wilde – that the British and the Americans are 'separated by a common language'. Thus, this text can be said to indicate a possible approach to showing students that communication is not always uncomplicated and straight-forward, and that misunderstandings need to be discussed and cleared up (*NPNP 3*: 144-146).

8.1.2 Varieties of accent

The CDs that accompany each textbook series present recordings of most of the prose texts, songs and poetry in the students' books, as well as the texts for listening (which are printed in the teacher's guides). All the textbook series have made an effort to show regional varieties of pronunciation, and especially *New People, New Places* and *Search* expose the students to a number of different accents. In addition to varieties of British and American pronunciation, accents can be heard from Ireland, Australia, South Africa and India. Great care has been taken to ensure that each text is read by a person who shows some regional trait of pronunciation that fits the text. An excerpt

from *Angela's Ashes,* for example, is read by one person with an Irish American and one person with an Italian American accent (*NPNP 2*: 44-46).

There are only a few instances where the accent does not correspond with the text, namely a fictional text about the American boy Bradley and a text about Bob Marley and reggae, which are both read by RP speakers (*Flight 8*: 16-21; *NPNP 3 TG*: 72). Other examples are the texts that present non-native speakers of English; in the recorded material, these people all speak perfect RP. This also applies to the Norwegians who appear in the textbooks.[97]

It can seem strange that so much effort has been put into providing the students with examples of many different accents, when so little has been done to point out and exploit the information value that lies in the recorded material. Only the teacher's guides in *New People, New Places* and *Catch* draw the teachers' attention to the fact that all texts are read with a (slight) regional accent that fits the text. In these textbook series, many of the regional varieties that are used in the recordings are also pointed out in the comments to each lesson, although no further information is given about the characteristics of each accent or dialect. In *Flight*, on the other hand, it is not pointed out that, in accordance with the geographical focus in the textbooks, most of the texts in *Flight 8* are read by RP speakers and most texts in *Flight 9* are read by speakers of General American. In *Search*, it seems to be expected that students and teachers will notice and appreciate the great number of different accents presented without having them pointed out.

A handful of exercises draw the students' attention to varieties of pronunciation, and the students are asked either to identify or to describe the different accents that they hear. In one exercise, students are told that an Englishman, an American and an Australian say the same six sentences, and they are then asked to identify the order in which they hear the different accents (*NPNP 1*: 187). A different approach is used in the few exercises that focus on accents as they occur in a given context. In connection with two texts for reading, students are asked to listen to the recorded versions of the texts and to identify typical traits of the speakers' Irish and Scottish accents (*Catch 9*: 166; *Catch 10*: 212). Six short texts for listening present speakers of RP, Cockney,

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[97] This point is followed up in section 8.1.4.

Scottish -, American -, Australian - or African English, and students are asked to determine which is which (*Catch 9*: 128). The texts provide clues by way of references to the places that the speakers come from and the speaker of Cockney, for example, speaks about the Arsenal football team, while the speaker of Australian English talks about life on the beach. Although these exercises indicate the danger of promoting stereotypes in the presentation of different accents, they also show the great information potential that lies in the interplay between text and context.

These exercises illustrate how the students' attention can be drawn to and prepared to meet and understand many different varieties of English. It seems obvious, however, that the learning effect of exercises like these could be improved if information had been provided about the characteristics of each accent, if students had been told what to listen for and how differences in pronunciation can be described.

8.1.3 Varieties of dialect

When it comes to different dialects, ie variations in grammar and lexis, the textbooks pay most explicit attention to the differences between British, American and Australian English. Some information is provided about British and American vocabulary and spelling, and there are also some examples of words and expressions that are used in Australian and New Zealand English (eg *Search 10*: 21; ibid: 28-29 *Search 8*: 196; *Flight 10*: 106). Some exercises follow up the information that is given.

Flight provides some examples of American and Cockney slang and students are asked to find out the meaning of words and phrases such as 'Yo, dude' and 'dickery dock' in 'normalized English' (*Flight 10 WB*: 139-140). Thus, this material can be said to indicate a useful approach when it comes to preparing students for the diversity of English and some of the difficulties that meeting different varieties of the language may involve. It may also help students see the relationship between oral, colloquial - and often non-standard - English on the one hand and Standard English on the other.

However, the textbooks' best examples of the diversity of English and English language use can be found in the regular texts for reading and listening. As indicated in Chapter 7, these texts take the readers to many different countries and involve people from many different segments of society. A fictional text from Australia, for

instance, illustrates the frequent use of the word 'mate' in Australian English, while Langston Hughes' short story 'Thank you, ma'am' shows that speakers of African-American English tend to use the double negative (*Catch 9*: 66-73; *NPNP 2*: 92-95). Many fictional texts provide examples of oral, colloquial style, such as American teenagers' use of words like 'wow', 'oops' 'huh' and 'c'mon!' (*Flight 9*: 166; *Flight 9 WB*: 51-51). Some of the dialogues in *New People, New Places* illustrate commonly used phrases like 'ain't' (eg *NPNP 2*: 70), 'are you kidding?' (*NPNP 2*: 180), 'Come on!' and 'Cool!' (*NPNP 2*: 99).

Some of the words and expressions that differ from Standard English are dealt with in the glossary that accompanies the text. 'Ain't', for example, is 'translated' to 'isn't' and 'a high five' is explained as a greeting with the palm of the hand (*NPNP 2*: 212).[98] The word 'mate' in the fictional text from Australia is given a literal translation ('venn, arbeidskamerat'), while another expression from the same text, 'pain in the arse', is translated into a much less colloquial Norwegian phrase ('en pine og plage'; *Catch 9*: 68).

It could be argued that students would benefit from more in-depth explanation of words and expressions such as these. 'Ain't' seems to be the prime example of a non-standard form that students ought to learn about, as they probably have noticed how frequently it is used in the English that they hear outside the classroom. Other words and expressions (such as 'give me a high five' and 'pain in the arse') could also be focused on in terms of how common they are and how acceptable they are in different contexts. A word like 'mate' certainly represents an important source of language and culture learning as well, if the uses and the meanings of it in Australian English are pointed out and explored (Wierzbicka 1997).[99]

More importance could also be attached to helping students sort out the difference between non-standard and Standard English. While many texts provide examples of oral, colloquial style, comments and exercises hardly ever draw the students' attention to this aspect of the texts. Moreover, when lists of possible realizations of language functions are presented, the expressions rarely correspond to

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[98] My translation.
[99] This perspective is followed up in section 9.3.4.

the actual language that the textbook characters use. The first example below shows the options that *Flight* presents for the students to practice 'To suggest what to do and how to answer', while the second one is an excerpt from the text 'Surfin' USA':

> *Would you like to* go to the movies? (Har du lyst til å…)
> *How about* going to the disco? (Hva med å…)
> *Why don't we* rent a video? (Skal vi…)
> *Let's go* fishing! (La oss…)(*Flight 9 WB*: 13).

> - You ready?
> - Ready - for what?
> - For the beach - what else? […] Tonight there's gonna be a beach party and …
> - Wow, let's go! (*Flight 9B*: 166)
> - You're cute! C'mon, let's go surfing! …(*Flight 9 WB*: 51)

However, some examples can be given of exercises that exploit the language that the texts illustrate. In a fictional text about an American football-player, students are asked to pick out 'words, expressions and sentences' in the text that they think are typically American (*Search 9*: 203). Before reading an excerpt from *Tom Sawyer*, students are asked to notice how the dialect shown in the dialogue differs from 'ordinary, written English' (*Catch 8*: 52). Another exercise introduces Andy Capp, 'a well-known working class figure from the North of England', and asks the students to translate the cartoon characters' non-standard English into 'plain English' (*Search 8*: 137-138). In identifying the speakers in the texts and encouraging students to examine the language that they use, these exercises indicate how students can be helped to discover and identify different varieties of English.

The students are, apparently, expected to learn and to speak 'proper (British?) English', but this is communicated only indirectly in the textbook series. One exercise, for example, asks the students to translate a passage from a fictional text about an American boy, and the purpose of this exercise is said to be to draw the students' attention to the boy's 'slovenly' speech (*Catch 10 TG*: 76).[100] Another exercise points to a sentence from two teenagers' conversation:

> 'Life ain't that simple' is an American expression. What would the normal British-English expression be? (*NPNP 2*: 71).

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[100] My translation.

It could be argued that, if the students are expected to avoid slang in their own English, this message could have been stated explicitly. Also, arguments for and against such a standpoint could certainly have contributed to the students' language awareness, and discussions in which students were invited to share and to develop their own points of view would probably be experienced as both motivating and relevant.

8.1.4 Native and non-native speakers

As already indicated, the textbooks contain only a few texts that show situations where English is used as a lingua franca, and very few non-native speakers of English are presented. Whenever non-native speakers (and writers) of English appear, they are shown as already being in perfect command of the language. All the Norwegians who are included in the texts come across as native speakers – and writers – of English, and there is no trace of a Norwegian accent in the recorded material. The four teenagers who talk together at a summer camp - in the text mentioned in section 8.1.1 - also express themselves in perfect, typically written language. Only Jean, who is French, has a slight non-native accent in the recorded version of the text (*NPNP 3*: 10-11).

It is, of course, understandable that textbook authors are reluctant to presenting authentic descriptions of non-native English use, since such renderings may not represent good role models for language learners. However, avoidance of non-native speakers of English or, rather, the presentation of glorified pictures of them, might have negative consequences, too. Such an approach could signal to the learners that native speaker competence is the ideal in foreign language education, and that anything short of this ideal is not highly valued. As pointed out in section 2.2.3, this message might certainly have an intimidating effect on the learners, and hinder them from accepting more realistic goals and developing their own, independent, positions as users of the foreign language.

An alternative strategy could be to acknowledge the fact that non-native English is a very common phenomenon, and one that students are exposed to all the time – not least in the classroom. In fact, it could be argued that non-native varieties of English ought to have a central place in a foreign language course, so that learners can get used to hearing, tolerating and trying to make sense of language produced at different levels of competence. In particular, realistic renderings of Norwegian speakers of English

(including typical mistakes that Norwegians tend to make) could represent a useful starting point for the students' assessment of their own language production. Seeing that language errors, or 'learning steps', are very common phenomena in foreign language learning might, in fact, represent an important confidence boost for the students.[101]

Only one Norwegian appears in the role of a language learner in the textbooks. He is an immigrant to the Unites States and writes a letter, partly in Norwegian, partly in English, in which he addresses the many challenges that foreign language learning involves. He describes not only the difficulty of learning English and of trying to speak it 'with boldness', but also the tendency to mix the old and the new language and the feeling of alienation vis-à-vis the new language and culture (*Search 10*: 158).

Although the use of a Norwegian text in an English language textbook cannot normally be recommended, the authors' argument for including this one seems to be a valid one. The text has been chosen, they say, because it deals with an important issue and can function as a good point of departure for the students' reflections on their own language learning (*Search 10 TG*: 79).

The frustrations of language learning and of not mastering a foreign language are dealt with in one fictional text, too. In 'When Hitler Stole the Pink Rabbit' readers get a powerful description of the stages of despair, hope and mastery that a German girl goes through as she and her family find themselves in France during World War II and have to learn a new language. After the text, the students are given the following task:

> Describe how you feel about learning English? Do you recognize any of Anna's feelings? What do you find easy and what is difficult? (*Search 8*: 38)

Although the students may constitute a rather heterogeneous group in many respects, they are all learners of English. Thus, it seems strange that the textbooks do not focus more on questions and challenges that have to do with this situation. It also seems strange that the many Norwegians who appear in the texts use English with such ease. Perhaps Norwegians are presented in this way in order to motivate the students and

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[101] Edge (1989) makes a point of shifting the perspective in foreign language education from 'mistakes' and 'errors' to 'learning steps'.

show them that mastery of English is an attainable goal. But an idealized presentation of foreign learners could also trigger negative reactions, since it provides an unrealistic picture of Norwegian users of English that most probably does not correspond to the students' own experience.

8.2 Focus on appropriate language use

8.2.1 Work with language functions

The textbooks address questions of appropriate language use first and foremost by offering students input and exercise material related to different language functions. A much used strategy is to present realizations of language functions in the form of lists of expressions. The example below shows some phrases that students are introduced to in order to express feelings of like and dislike, and they are then asked to choose among the phrases when they tell each other how they feel about issues such as homework, pets and different school subjects:

Dislike:	Like:
I don't like it.	I like it.
I don't fancy it.	I rather fancy it.
I'm not keen on it.	I'm keen on it.
It's boring.	It's interesting.
I hate it.	I love it.
I can't stand it.	It's great fun.
I detest (avskyr) it.	I adore it.
It's the pits (bånn).	It's tops.
It's bad, awful, terrible,	It's good, wonderful, fantastic,
horrible, dreadful etc.	marvellous, terrific, etc (*Flight 8 WB*: 39-40).

Some lists seem to reflect teenage jargon, although this is not pointed out to the students. These are the phrases that students are expected to learn in order to be able to express belief / disbelief:

> Come off it!
> Rubbish!
> You are joking / kidding!
> You are pulling my leg!
> Gosh! / Gee! / Gee whiz!
> You don't say? […] (*Flight 8 WB*: 113)

Such lists of expressions present many useful phrases and also indicate to the students that there is a variety of linguistic options to choose from in any given situation. Still, it can be argued that the ways in which language functions are dealt with in the textbook series are problematic for several reasons.[102]

First of all, questions can be asked about the information value that lists of expressions have, when the different realizations of a language function are not linked to different situations of language use and explored in terms of their meaning potential. Most of the exercises that follow up the expressions aim only to make the students familiar with the different phrases, in drill-like activities. Although this can be seen as a necessary first step, it seems a pity that the textbooks' suggestions for the students' work with the different expressions, most often, end here.

Most of the exercises give the impression that students can choose freely from the items on the list. Thus, the students may remain unaware that, in real life communication, it is rarely a good idea to choose language at random, without considering the different elements that constitute the context in which it is to be used. This problem applies, in particular, to the cases when the textbooks provide examples of expressions that may be acceptable in a conversation between teenagers, but that may be quite inappropriate in other situations, as the example above indicates.

The value of such lists can also be questioned if the students are not encouraged to try out and explore *all* the different expressions that are presented. A natural tendency among learners of a foreign language would probably be to adopt and use words and phrases that correspond most closely to those in their own language. When it comes to expressing feelings of like and dislike, for example, Norwegian learners might be likely to prefer the phrases 'I like it', 'I don't like it' and 'it's good / bad' in the list cited above. In order for them to see the possibilities that the new language represents, however, they need to be helped to understand and master words and phrases that are further removed from the ones they are used to, both linguistically and semantically.

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[102] It is, first and foremost, *Flight* and *New People, New Places* that make use of such lists of expressions.

Finally, it can be argued that the value of lists of expressions may be undermined if there is discrepancy between the language that they present and the language that is used in the texts for reading and listening. For example, students may wonder why they are asked to practice greetings by way of phrases such as 'Hi. Hello. Good morning/afternoon/evening/night. How do you do?' when the main character in the text that the exercises are attached to say 'Hey, sonny, com 'ere. Hey, talkin' to ya. Come 'ere' (*NPNP* 2: 48: ibid: 45).[103]

It is, of course, understandable that textbook authors want to provide students at the lower secondary level with only a basic, but functional linguistic repertoire. Still, it seems a pity not to exploit the many examples of language use in real-life contexts that the texts for reading and listening provide. While students should not necessarily have to practice and remember the many varieties that they encounter in the texts they would, without doubt, benefit from exploring the language that is used as well as some of the reasons why people may be using it.

It must also be remembered that most Norwegian students are exposed to considerable amounts of English outside the classroom. Thus, they may be more familiar with the many varieties of English language use than teachers and textbook authors realize. The students' experiences with English outside the school situation clearly represent great potential for learning, not least when it comes to issues of appropriate language use in specific situations.

A few exercises indicate how students can be helped to see how language varies from one context to another. In connection with the list of possible greetings mentioned above, for example, students are asked to consider if they would use different phrases when meeting their best friend and their teacher (*NPNP 2*: 48). Another exercise presents a number of expressions that can be used when someone asks for a favor or offers an apology, and the students are asked to select a response that will suit a specific situation:

> How would you respond when someone says?[104]
> 1 I'm sorry, I didn't mean to push you.
> 2 I'm afraid I can't come to your party tonight.

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[103] The quote is taken from an excerpt from Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes.*
[104] Sic.

3 Excuse me. Could you tell me the time, please?
4 I'm afraid I forgot to buy potatoes (*NPNP 2*: 39).

Another exercise introduces the students to a variety of possible reactions to someone's good or bad test results. There are phrases such as 'well done', 'oh dear', 'it's your own fault' and 'hard luck', and the students are then asked to group the different expressions under the headings 'positive', 'sympathetic' and 'not very friendly' (*NPNP 1*: 155).

The contexts that these exercises indicate could, of course, have been spelled out in more detail and thus provided more food for thought when it comes to exploring the types of language that could be used in them. Nevertheless, exercises such as these could be said to represent a useful starting point from which more extensive language awareness exercises could be developed in the future.

8.2.2 Contexts of language use

It was argued in Chapter 3 that it would be natural to prepare Norwegian students at the lower secondary level for English language use in the personal domain. The idea would be to prepare students for language use related to topics and situations that they are familiar with, and also to provide them with a content that they will experience as relevant, interesting and, thus, motivating.

In today's textbooks this is done not by focusing on situations, but rather on topics that may link up with the students' experience and their everyday lives. As indicated in section 6.1.1, many of the textbook chapters deal with typical teenage issues, such as love and friendship (*Flight 10*; *Catch 10*), school (*Flight 8*; *NPNP 1*; *NPNP 2*; *Search 8*; *Catch 8*), sports and hobbies (*Flight 9*; *Search 9; Catch 10*), animals (*Flight 8*; *Catch 8*; *NPNP 1*), growing up (*Catch 9*; *Search 9*) and 'Being a teenager' (*Search 8*). Here, students are provided with many words and phrases that may be useful whenever they want to talk about these issues.

However**,** much more could probably have been done in order to link the material that the textbooks offer to the students' own contexts. Many opportunities can be pointed out, both in connection with the texts and topics that are chosen and the ways in which students are encouraged to work with them.

One natural focus of attention here are the arenas of English language use that most Norwegian students are already familiar with, for example those related to the movie and the music industry. Since very few foreign series and films shown in Norway are dubbed, and since the song lyrics that Norwegian youngsters listen to are in English just as often as they are in Norwegian, many Norwegian teenagers may get as much – if not more – exposure to English outside the classroom as they do during English lessons at school. In the textbooks there are occasional references to films that the students have seen or music that they listen to (eg *NPNP 2*: 171; ibid: 164), but it seems obvious that the language learning potential of the students' activities in these areas could be exploited to a much higher degree.

Computer-based activities and the internet represent another arena that could be used much more actively in order to connect the teaching and learning of English to the students' own experience. In the textbooks investigated, the internet is mentioned only as one of many sources of reference when students are asked to find out more about a given topic.[105] One possibility here could be to challenge the students themselves to explore the opportunities that computer-based activities may provide, and thus relate the spare time activities that the students are already engaged in to the language learning situation.

The exercise material has, of course, a crucial role to play when it comes to 'reconnecting' the textbook materials and the work that is done in the classroom to contexts that are relevant and meaningful for the students. The most important issue here is probably to open for the students' own meaning making and personal involvement with the texts and the tasks.[106] But another approach could be to point to and prepare students for situations where it is likely that their English skills will be needed.

Although there is a scarcity of such exercises in the textbooks, some examples of relevant situations can be given. *Flight* attaches a few exercises to the texts that have to do with tourism, and students are asked to practice what to say when shopping for clothes and responding to a tourist guide (*Flight 10 WB*: 97-98; ibid: 58-59). Other

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[105] *New People, New Places* makes a point of referring to 'reference books, E-mail, Internet or CD-ROM' whenever project work is mentioned.
[106] This perspective is followed up in section 10.2.2.

exercises focus on situations where students need to talk about their own country to visitors from abroad. Among the topics covered here are the Norwegian language situation, the Norwegian school system and Norwegian Christmas traditions (*Search 10*: 145; *NPNP 2*: 110; *Flight 8 WB*: 93). One exercise points to a particularly relevant issue:

> As a Norwegian, you might need to have an opinion on whale hunting when you travel abroad. Write a list of arguments for and against the hunting of whales. Discuss in groups or in class (*Search 10*: 236).

Another probable situation of language use is pointed out in *New People, New Places*, when students are asked to explain the dishes in a Norwegian restaurant to an imaginary Indian guest (*NPNP* 3: 89), and there are also some tasks that encourage students to present their home place to potential visitors (eg *Catch 8*: 118; *NPNP 1*: 73; *NPNP 3*: 156). The topics of some other tasks, however, seem rather arbitrarily chosen, such as when students are asked to 'present the Norwegian "nisse" ("fjøsnisse") to somebody from another culture' (*Catch 8*: 82).

Sometimes, students are prepared for specific situations of language use by way of a 'model dialogue' that illustrates typical phrases that can be used. This might be a good idea with situations that call for relatively set formulae, such as when making a phone call and, as indicated in the previous section, when meeting and greeting people (see eg *Flight 8 WB*: 22; *NPNP 2*: 78). However, as pointed out in section 6.2.6, one obvious problem with 'model dialogues' is that they can convey the impression that situations are essentially the same all over the world, and that the linguistic repertoire needed when performing different actions is identical in all cultural contexts.

Since this is not the case, it can be argued that there is a need for explanatory comments in connection with dialogues that present 'core' language for use in specific situations. Such information can probably be given in a way that will be experienced as both interesting and useful. One example can be seen in Hasan's (1985) description of the very different ways in which buying and selling takes place around the world.

Quite a few exercises in the textbooks indicate situations that have little relevance for the students' own situation, and many of these place the students in the role of a native speaker. A whole range of examples could be mentioned, such as when

students are asked to argue why they ought to transfer from a public school to a comprehensive school (*NPNP 1*: 158), when they are expected to prepare a speech at Speaker's Corner (*Flight 8 WB*: 64) and when they are to open a new restaurant ('The Happy Carrot') and make a menu for it (*Catch 8*: 158).

Some exercises indicate situations of language use that are even more far fetched, and especially *New People, New Places* indicates many situations that are quite far removed from anything the students will ever experience themselves. The idea is, apparently, to appeal to the students' fantasy and the possible motivation effect of having to play a role. However, this effect may be questioned when students are asked to engage in conversations with a monster, a mummy and a Viking, for example, or with a soldier at the battle of Culloden in 1746 (*NPNP 1*: 46; ibid: 25; *NPNP 2*: 28; *NPNP 1*: 133). Other exercises are even more bizarre, when students are asked to make up a dialogue between two ravens, two crocodiles, and also to make up a telephone conversation between different animals (*NPNP 1*: 33; ibid: 195; ibid: 151). When Norwegian students have an obvious need to learn how to use English in a great variety of different, real life contexts, it certainly seems strange that textbooks make an effort to establish such artificial situations.

8.2.3 Conventions of language use

In today's textbooks, different conventions of language use are dealt with only by way of sporadic reminders to 'be polite'. Whenever this is mentioned, the impression is given that the main challenge is to remember to say 'please' and 'thank you' (eg *NPNP 1*: 129). *Catch* makes the point most explicitly, in a dialogue where phrases like 'please', 'thank you', sorry' and 'excuse me' are singled out and underlined. Then, the authors instruct the students:

> Do you think that there are a lot of 'Thank you's here? To British people this isn't strange at all. Polite words or phrases (groups of words) such as 'Thank you', 'Please', 'Excuse me', 'I'm sorry' are used very often in Britain. The most important thing to remember is that people will expect you to be polite in the same way as they are (*Catch 8*: 181).

New People, New Places mentions a few other traits of polite language use as well. Here, students are told that it is not polite to answer a question just with a single 'yes'

or 'no' (*NPNP 2*: 162-163), and they are also reminded to use the name of the person they are talking to:

> 'Do you fancy coming to the movie theater some night, Judy?'…
> 'Yes, I'd love to. Thanks, Graham' […]
> To be polite, you should use the name of the person you are talking to
> and always say thanks/thank you/no thanks/no thank you (*NPNP 2*: 108-
> 109).

While the investigated textbooks present 'politeness' as an unambiguous entity, an alternative approach could be to point out the fact that politeness can mean very different things in different contexts. The example above, for example, could be said to represent a suitable opportunity to inform Norwegian students about different levels of formality and that, in many situations, it would be quite inappropriate to address people by using their first names.

Quite a few dialogues in the textbooks do not show very polite behaviour. Often, this is a result of the fact that dialogues are constructed in order to present and illustrate grammar points and vocabulary. The text below is included in a section that focuses on the difference between 'to be' and 'to have':

> 'Where are you from?'
> 'I'm from Harrow.'
> 'Where's that?'
> 'Just outside London. It's a suburb.'
> 'Have you any brothers and sisters?'
> 'Yes, a sister. She's a policewoman. She's just got a job in Dundee.'
> 'Has she? I've no idea where that is.'
> 'In Scotland. Very dull.' […] (*NPNP 1*: 21).

Dialogues such as this one may, of course, have a role to play in illustrating certain language points. At the same time, it could be argued that students would benefit from learning that the person who asks questions in this dialogue shows a directness of speech that, in a real life situation, probably would be considered quite inappropriate. In this way, students could be helped to consider different ways in which questions can be asked, and examples of awkward language use could, in fact, function as useful starting points for language awareness exercises.

The need to avoid being impolite is addressed in one exercise only. A text introduces Kari, who is staying in an English home, and describes how she – politely –

tries to get away from a very talkative hostess. Students are then asked to act out a conversation where one party tries to bring it to a close in a polite way, by using phrases like 'it's getting late…', 'is that really the time?' and 'I've still got a lot of work/shopping to do…'. Although it could be argued that more apologetic and tentative phrases ought to be presented, the exercise is worth noticing as it indicates how an important issue in foreign language learning can be dealt with (*NPNP 3*: 54-55).

Many different conventions of language use can be seen in the textbook texts, and much learning could result from close scrutiny of them. Several texts, for example, show the positive tone that is customary among many native speakers of English, as in this dialogue in *Flight*:

> Judy has come to her friend Elaine's house for dinner. […]
> Mrs C: *Help yourself* to spaghetti sauce, Judy!
> Judy: Thank you, Mrs Carpenter - *this looks lovely!*
> Elaine: *Would you like* the tomato sauce or the cream sauce?
> Judy: *I'd love to* try the tomato sauce, please!
> […] This is really delicious, Mrs Carpenter! I'd love to have the recipe.
> […]
> Mrs C: How about you, Elaine? *Some more* spaghetti?
> Elaine: *No, thanks,* mum. *I'm full.* It was terrific, as always!
> Judy: Yes, Mrs Carpenter, you really are a wonderful cook! (*Flight 8 WB*: 87)

The italicized phrases indicate the language that the students are expected to learn. The selection seems to reflect the tradition in the teaching of English of focusing on items of language that convey information (phrases like 'help yourself', 'some more?' and 'I'm full'). However, it could be argued that it would be even more useful for learners to learn phrases that aim to create a positive atmosphere, such as 'this is really delicious', 'I'd love to have the recipe', 'it was terrific, as usual' and 'you really are a wonderful cook'.

One exercise encourages students to practice polite phrases at a tea party. They are expected to ask for and pass each other different items, and practice phrases such as 'would you like…?', 'do you take…?', 'sugar?' and 'how about…?' But the text that is used as a basis for this exercise exemplifies other, useful language as well:

> **Mrs F**: Gemma, could I have one of those delicious little cakes do you think? I really shouldn't, but they look too tempting for words.
> **Gemma**: Yes, they do look tempting, don't they.
> [...]
> **Gemma**: Can I pass anyone anything? Mr Fotherington, what about another slice of chocolate cake?
> **Mr F**: Not allowed, I'm afraid, even though it is my favorite (*Catch 8 TG*: 92).

It could be argued that both examples above indicate a useful opportunity for Norwegian students, who may be used to less exuberant language, to learn an important cultural lesson. In order for this to happen, however, it would be necessary to explain, explore and open for practice of the panegyric phrases that the texts exemplify.

8.3 Summary and discussion

The textbooks indicate that English is used in many different countries in the world, and there are also some texts that focus on the role of English as a lingua franca. Quite a few examples of the diversity of the language are provided. In the recorded material, many different accents can be heard, and the texts for reading and listening exemplify quite a few dialects and sociolects.

However, the learning potential of this material could, clearly, have been exploited better. More commentaries and exercises could have drawn the students' attention to the varieties of language that the texts illustrate. The same thing can be said about the texts' information value when it comes to showing the ways in which language changes in accordance with the situations and the contexts in which it is used. Thus, there seem to be many opportunities for future textbooks to make better use of the input that the texts for reading and listening provide.

In order for this to happen, however, textbooks need to address the problem that may arise when the textbook texts exemplify words and phrases that the learners are not expected to adopt. In present-day books there is often a discrepancy between the language shown in the texts and the language that the exercise material encourages the students to practice and to use. While quite a few texts illustrate non-standard English

and teenage jargon, for example, it is implied that this language is not to be used by the students.

There may, of course, be good reasons to teach students a 'formal' variety of English (Saville-Troike 1996). At the same time, it does not seem like a good idea to let the examples of non-standard English that the texts illustrate pass unnoticed, without commenting upon them. Also, as Corbett (2003) points out, it is quite a paradox if learners of a foreign language are expected to follow a norm that many native speakers of the same language do not follow. In fact, it may be motivating for students to learn that native speakers of the language, too, have problems adhering to norms of correctness.[107]

Since Norwegian students meet considerable amounts of English outside the classroom, chances are that they are already quite familiar with many colloquial and non-standard words and phrases. If textbooks address issues related to linguistic diversity, they may therefore link up with knowledge that students already have. This could be an important measure when it comes to demonstrating that the teaching of English in school aims to prepare students for language use in the real world.

Another reason to focus on linguistic diversity can be found in the constant development that languages undergo and the forces that influence this development. Both as non-native speakers of English, as teenagers and as participants in Western youth culture, many Norwegian students probably identify themselves more easily with the centrifugal than with the centripetal forces in the development of the English language.[108] In order to encourage students to reflect on their own identities as users of English, it would thus seem natural that the teaching of English both acknowledges and addresses issues related to varieties of language and language use.

Many textbook texts deal with topics that appear to have been chosen in order to appeal to the students' interests and to motivate them for work with the language. Hence, students get quite a bit of practice speaking about topics such as animals, hobbies, friendship and love. However, the textbooks make few attempts to indicate to

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[107] A text and an exercise in *Search* address this issue by encouraging students to correct the language errors that a British school boy makes in a poem (*Search 8*: 24-25).
[108] Bakhtin (1981) describes centripetal forces as working towards unified language use, while centrifugal forces work towards more diversified language use. Speakers at the periphery of the social system seem to contribute most to the latter (Duranti 1997; see section 2.1.2.2).

the students in which situations and contexts they may need to use their English skills and to model such situations for them.

It is, of course, quite difficult to know exactly which future contexts of language use the students may find themselves in. What is certain, however, is that they are all (with very few exceptions) language learners and non-native speakers of English, and that they will use the language as a lingua franca, in contacts with people both in and outside the English-speaking world. Therefore it seems strange that so few texts and exercises in the textbooks point to communication situations that involve language learners and non-native speakers. In fact, it can be argued that the challenges related to such situations are swept under the carpet, since the few non-native speakers who appear in the texts all speak perfect English and seem to have no problems making themselves understood.

A few exercises encourage students to speak English to imaginary visitors to their own home place and to explain an aspect of Norwegian society to a foreigner. Such situations seem highly relevant, and there is reason to believe that students will find it both useful and motivating to work with them. It could be argued, then, that future textbooks ought to include more exercises and activities that draw the students' attention to the possible arenas of language use where they may be likely to need their English skills.

Greater efforts could also be made when it comes to encouraging students to establish such arenas themselves. The English syllabus in *L-97* states explicitly that students are expected to have contacts with people in other countries and that such contacts should contribute much to the content of the course. In the textbooks, however, hardly any reminders are made to establish such contacts and no help is given as to how they could be developed.

There also seems to be great potential for development when it comes to exploiting the arenas outside the classroom where the students already have contact with the English language. Most Norwegian students are exposed to English in a number of different leisure activities, and it seems obvious that textbooks ought to make great efforts to link up with these activities both in texts, topics and, not least, in exercises.

The exercise material in today's textbooks does not attach much importance to different conventions of language use and to the development of the students' ability to use English appropriately in different situations. The most explicit references to the choices that language users need to make are done in the form of work with different realizations of language functions, and by way of sporadic reminders to 'be polite'. No mention is made of the need for Norwegians to be aware of their own discourse conventions when using a foreign language.

The texts for reading and listening, however, provide a wealth of examples of the language that people actually use in real-life contexts. Thus, there seems to be an obvious opportunity for future textbooks to exploit these texts more than present-day textbooks do and to encourage students to explore the relationships between language and context that the texts exemplify.

9 Intercultural issues

It was established in chapters 2 and 3 that there can be several good reasons to concern oneself with intercultural issues in foreign language education. First of all, in order to be able to use the foreign language successfully, it can be a good idea to prepare oneself for the cultural challenges that such situations, most often, involve. Secondly, intercultural awareness and understanding for 'the other' can be seen as an important goal in itself. As the world is getting smaller and smaller and intercultural contacts are the order of the day, work with intercultural issues must be said to be highly relevant for everyone, with or without the use of a foreign language. Intercultural learning, then, aims to prepare students for situations where members of different cultures meet and communicate.

Earlier chapters have shown that, although the textbooks do present people from a variety of foreign countries and also provide considerable amounts of information about foreign cultures, they cannot be said to draw the students' attention to the challenges that intercultural encounters may entail. Little emphasis is attached to encouraging students to reflect on intercultural issues, to compare different cultures, and to consider the ways in which foreign cultures differ from their own. There are also only a few examples of texts and exercises that help students to see themselves from an outsider's perspective.

Still, it is obvious that much of the material in the textbooks could be well suited as the starting point for intercultural learning, if students were encouraged to investigate and work with it from such a perspective. The following discussion therefore focuses on the possibilities and the challenges for work with intercultural learning that the material can be said to indicate, and it also points to the few examples of texts, topics and exercises in the textbooks that seem to be geared towards the development of the students' intercultural awareness.

Section 9.1 looks at some approaches to work that aims to draw the students' attention to different cultural practices around the world, while section 9.2 discusses some issues related to the presentation of cultural encounters. Section 9.3 turns to

some of the challenges and opportunities related to the presentation of 'the other' and discusses how stereotypes can be dealt with.

9.1 Focus on cultural practices around the world – the comparison of cultures

Descriptions of and encounters with 'the other' may be seen as central ingredients in intercultural learning. In order to be able to cope with cultural encounters, there is a need for students to meet and learn about people who behave, believe and look at the world in a variety of different ways, and there is also an obvious need for the students to become more aware of some of the manifestations of their own culture. What, then, can present-day textbooks teach us about the ways in which this can be done?

The question of culture-specific reference seems to be a basic one. In the investigated textbooks, quite a few texts provide only vague references to foreign cultural contexts and present little food for thought when it comes to exploring cultural differences. Moreover, many texts must be said to reflect an unspecified, albeit clearly Western, context that most students might recognize as their own. Thus, in order for future textbooks for the teaching of English to contribute to the students' intercultural learning, it seems that more texts ought to be included that provide clear pictures of specific countries and cultures.

Introductions, commentaries and activities also have an important role to play here and future textbooks could, clearly, use such texts more actively than today's textbooks do when it comes to drawing the students' attention to manifestations of cultural and intercultural issues in the texts. More questions and exercises could encourage students – and show them how - to investigate texts and topics from an intercultural learning perspective. The fictional texts that involve American teenagers, for example, can be said to represent unexploited potential in today's textbooks for students to explore relevant 'others', their cultural practices and communication styles.

Texts that focus explicitly on customs and lifestyles that are different from typically Norwegian ones, combined with exercises that ask the students to relate the information to their own experience represent one possible format when it comes to intercultural learning. *Search* provides several examples of such exercises. After a young girl's description of the ways in which young people in Malta usually spend

their summers, the students are asked to tell a foreigner about the special things that Norwegians usually do at this time of year (*Search 10*: 137-138). In connection with a text in which English children tell about the ways they celebrate Christmas, students are asked to write down three things in their stories that differ from Norwegian customs (*Search 8*: 94)**.**

These exercises can, of course, be criticized on the grounds that they encourage students to tell about what 'we Norwegians' do. It can be argued that, instead of implying that Norwegians constitute a homogenous group, exercises could be given that encourage students to investigate the diversity of practices in their own country. One possible solution here could lie in focusing on individual stories, thus acknowledging the fact that the students themselves probably do quite different things on different occasions and at different times of the year. This approach is used in an exercise which is related to the presentation of Christmas in *Catch*:

> Imagine you have a penfriend in another country. Write or make a short tape about what *you* do at Christmas (*Catch 8*: 88).

In trying to develop awareness of cultural differences, the diversity of the students' own environment – and even their own classroom – could be seen as an obvious source of insight. One possibility here could be to exploit the students' different reactions to the texts and the topics that they work with. While present-day textbooks most often encourage only individual response when they ask students to provide their reactions to a text or an issue, an alternative strategy could be to ask the students to find out about their classmates' points of view. Such activities could help draw each student's attention to the fact that any text and any issue can be understood and interpreted in a number of different ways, and the many understandings and opinions that may be voiced could make a fruitful starting point for pair, group and class discussions.

Another natural approach could be to turn to the characteristics and the background experience of the student group itself, and focus on the differences that can be found there. While this is done to a very limited degree in the investigated textbooks, a few examples of activities can be given. One exercise asks the students to do a survey in class in order to find out what type of music the different classmates

like and dislike, another exercise focuses on the newspapers that they read (*Search 10*: 52; *Search 9*: 163). In activities like these students could get many opportunities to get to know their fellow students better and to learn about possible differences in background, behaviors and beliefs in their peer group.

Students are, of course, different in many different ways, and *Search* indicates that the learning situation itself can be exploited in work that aims to develop the students' understanding for 'the other'. Attached to a poem about a person with spelling problems, the students are asked to write about and discuss the situation of a pupil who is struggling with spelling (*Search 10*: 105). After having been asked to choose and read either an easy or a more difficult version of a text, the students are asked to read the other version as well. Then they are asked to 'Write down the reasons why you think some pupils might prefer this version' (*Search 10*: 184).

Quite a few texts focus on cultural differences around the world, and they exemplify different approaches to such an undertaking. One text for listening comprehension in *New People, New Places* deals explicitly with the problem of coping with cultural differences and addresses the need to adjust one's behavior according to local conventions. The text lists several things that would be considered improper in different countries, for example visiting a temple without a head dress, or making sounds while eating. Some Norwegian customs that may be considered strange in other countries are also mentioned, such as taking one's shoes off when entering a house. The text ends with a call for tolerance of differences:

> Why customs arise is a subject for sociologists, anthropologists and other researchers. Why people can't get along with each other because of different customs is a subject for us all (*NPNP 3 TG*: 70).

Attached to the text is an exercise that asks the students to make a list of things foreign visitors to their part of Norway should and should not do (*NPNP 3*: 156). This text and task seem to represent a useful approach to intercultural learning in the way that information about cultural differences is provided at the same time as students are helped to see themselves from an outsider's perspective, thus indicating that cultural encounters may be challenging for both parties involved.

Another approach can be seen in a few texts that bring people from different backgrounds together. One text for listening, for example, is an interview with five people from England, the United States and Australia who all describe what they eat for breakfast (*Catch 8 TG*: 87-88). Only rather common menus are described, but the text certainly indicates that people have quite different preferences and that much culture and language learning can result from listening to people who tell about the choices that they make in their everyday lives.

Most of the texts that focus on cultural differences in the textbooks describe the ways in which Christmas is celebrated around the world. Students are taken to England, Australia and New Zealand, and a variety of customs and traditions are described (eg *Flight 8*: 74-77; *Catch 8*: 88-90; *Catch 9*: 84-85). There is a primary focus on factual information, and many exercises ask students simply to recapitulate details from the texts.

A series of monologues in *Catch 8,* however, indicate a different approach. Here, four children tell the reader about the best Christmas party they have ever been to (*Catch 8*: 91-92). These texts present information about Christmas traditions in different countries and, since they provide some insight into 'real' people's experiences, thoughts and preferences, they may be likely to appeal to the students' emotional involvement as well. Thus, the texts could be said to indicate how factual information can be conveyed in a way that may also have a positive influence on the students' attitudes towards the cultures presented.

One text in *Catch,* 'Not everyone celebrates Christmas', indicates how today's textbooks' focus on a few, central Western holidays could – and probably should – be expanded. Three young people from the United Kingdom provide personal renderings of the observance of the festivals Eid, Diwali and Hanukkah and how important these celebrations are to them (*Catch 9*: 86-87; *Catch 9 TG*: 69-70). In an exercise that is attached to the text, students are asked to find out as much as possible about these festivals. Since this topic area is highly relevant when it comes to intercultural learning, it seems that it could be exploited to a much greater extent in future foreign language textbooks.

Many other approaches can also, of course, be used in order to draw the students' attention to cultural differences. One text in *Flight* illustrates how students can be informed about aspects of British education by comparing them to similar aspects of the Norwegian school system. It could be argued that such a comparison of cultures may have (at least) two different positive effects. On the one hand, linking new information to that which the students already know will, most likely, make the learning process easier and more meaningful for the students. Also, a comparative approach opens for an outsider's perspective on *both* cultures, and seems thus to have particular potential when it comes to intercultural learning. As mentioned in section 7.2.1, the text in *Flight* makes the students aware that, to British students, it is the Norwegian educational system that may seem strange (*Flight 8*: 10-13).

9.2 Cultural encounters

Descriptions of cultural encounters seem to be particularly relevant in a foreign language course (Cortazzi & Jin 1999). First of all, such descriptions can be motivating in the way that they indicate situations in which the foreign language can be used. Secondly, such texts can make it possible for students to see and explore the differences and the borders between cultures. Last, but not least, descriptions of cultural encounters can draw the students' attention to – and thus prepare them for – some of the challenges that meetings between people from different cultural backgrounds may involve.

Future textbooks for the teaching of English could, clearly, exploit the possibilities for intercultural learning that lie in such texts to a much greater extent than present-day textbooks do. As shown in Chapter 7, these textbooks include relatively few texts that describe cultural encounters. Often, people from different cultural backgrounds appear in texts only in order to convey factual information about the respective countries, and little insight is given into the personal relationships between them.

It is also worth noticing that most of the cultural encounters described in the textbooks involve members of different ethnic or cultural groups within one foreign country, ie 'them' and 'them'. Hardly any Norwegians are involved in these texts. In

this way, the impression might be given that the challenges of cultural encounters do not concern 'us' and that cultural differences cause a problem only when members of other cultural groups meet, in societies that are far removed from the students' own.

As indicated in section 7.2.9, the Norwegians who are included in the textbooks appear, first and foremost, as the narrators of texts that describe foreign travel. The letters, post cards and diary entries that they write relate only the surface facts of the journey, such as details from the itinerary and brief information about the places that they visit. The tourists do not seem to have any contact with the local inhabitants, and no reports are made of practical or cultural problems on the trips. The only exception to this picture can be seen in *Flight*, where a text is included about a Norwegian family who get cheated while vacationing in London (*Flight 8*: 44-47). Since tourism is an arena of foreign language use that most Norwegians probably find relevant, it seems that more attention could be paid to cultural issues related to tourist activities in English textbooks in the future.

Norwegians also appear in some texts that have to do with immigration to the United States. These texts describe practical problems, language difficulties as well as personal distress, especially in the form of severe homesickness, and could probably be well suited as the starting point for intercultural learning. In fact, maybe a story about a cultural encounter in a foreign country or in a different time could be said to provide the distance that is necessary in order for students to be able to see the challenges of similar situations in their own environment in a new light. Exercises and activities must, then, create a link between the topic of the text and the students' own experience. This happens in some discussion questions that are attached to a historical survey of US immigration when students are asked to discuss whether or not immigrants should be encouraged to keep their own culture after having settled in a new country. They are also asked to reflect on their own feelings about living in a foreign country and the possibility of having to change their own customs (*Catch 10*: 32).

Some of the other texts that describe cultural encounters between 'them' and 'them' are related to the students' own situation as well. An excerpt from the fictional text *To Sir with Love* describes the tensions between different ethnic groups in

London. Here, students are encouraged in the following way to expand on the issues that the text raises:

> Turn the text, or parts of it, into a play and perform it at your school. Use the play to provoke reactions on the subject of racism and how it can be defeated (*NPNP 3*: 73).

Although texts that involve 'other' people can be made relevant to the students' own situation, it would probably be a good idea for future textbooks to include more descriptions of cultural encounters that may, at least potentially, involve the students themselves. Some texts in the investigated textbooks indicate contexts and topic areas that could be particularly interesting and relevant for the students. One text in *New People, New Places* is a believable and amusing rendering of experiences related to a student exchange situation. It is the story of Tom, who dreads the thought of having a French student, a 'Froggie', stay with them for the summer. He claims that he has many reasons to be skeptical:

> Some of the foreign students had already arrived in the village and they weren't inspiring. Funny shoes, bow ties and jabber-jabber-jabber. Even the local girls were hesitating (*NPNP 3*: 170).

In the end, Tom is confronted with a person who does not at all fit in with his expectations, and he is more than happy to spend the summer with charming Françoise. This text, then, describes a cultural encounter and a situation of foreign language use that many Norwegian students can relate to. But it also exemplifies the groundless preconceptions one may have about other people and the unexpected outcomes that many cultural meetings may have.

Another text that is even closer to the students' own situation was mentioned in section 7.2.3, and it describes an Australian boy and the way that he experiences life in Norway (*Flight 10*: 90-93). The interview with Jeffrey Thomson who goes to school in Trondheim models a possible arena where the students can use their foreign language skills. In addition, the text is a good example of how students can be helped to see themselves from an outsider's perspective and to reflect on some issues that may come into play when Norwegians meet people from other cultural backgrounds.

Texts that describe conflicting values and beliefs seem particularly relevant when it comes to intercultural learning, and fictional texts can often describe such conflicts in convincing and powerful ways. Some texts have already been mentioned, for example the one about the young Native American boy who is drawn between the values that he has been brought up with in his home community and the ones that he meets at school (*Flight* 9: 39-43; see section 7.3.2). An exercise that is attached to this text asks the students to reflect in more general terms on the problem of being drawn between cultures:

> What could be the problems of belonging to one culture and living in another? Many people all over the world do this today, for different reasons. Discuss this in class (*Flight 9*: 43)

Other fictional texts that describe cultural conflicts do not have exercises and activities attached to them. This goes, for example, for a text that presents the very different lifestyles and ideologies of an Australian aborigine and a British fashion model. The Aborigine describes the values of his native culture, and criticizes the fashion model for her urban and materialistic life-style (*Flight 10 WB*: 70-72). Another text tells the heartbreaking story of the African girl Remi, who was sent from Nigeria to an English boarding school when she was six. When we meet her, she has been transformed into a young Englishwoman, and she does not recognize her father when he comes to visit (*Flight 10 WB*: 144-147). Both these texts are suggested for extra reading in the *Flight* workbooks.

It could, perhaps, be argued that the relevant and interesting content of a text may, in itself, encourage students to reflect on the questions that are being raised. Nevertheless, there seem to be many good reasons to use texts like these ones as the starting point for activities that aim to develop the students' intercultural awareness as well as their language skills.

Yet another possibility for intercultural learning can be seen in the role that the authors of a textbook adopt. In today's textbooks, the authors' voice is heard only indirectly, first and foremost in their encouraging comments to the exercise material. In *Catch,* however, the authors sometimes emerge as interviewers of people from different parts of the world (eg *Catch 9 TG*: 68-70; *Catch 9 TG*: 79-81; *Catch 10 TG*:

114-115). While these interviews focus on the exchange of factual information and provide very little insight into the relationship between the people involved, better opportunities for intercultural learning could be given if the authors made themselves more visible (cf Risager 1991). In addition to making aspects of their own cultural context explicit, they could also express their reactions to some of the manifestations of the foreign culture that they encounter and, thus, give some of the textbook texts and commentaries to the texts the form of a cultural dialogue.

The most obvious opportunity for students to experience and to learn from cultural encounters lies, of course, in the contacts that they themselves can establish with people in other countries. As indicated in the previous chapter, the investigated textbooks do not follow up the English syllabus' call for this to happen. Therefore, there seems to be great potential for development in future textbooks for the teaching of English when it comes to encouraging such contacts and showing how they can be exploited in the language - and culture - learning situation.

9.3 Challenges and opportunities related to the presentation of 'the other'

9.3.1 Simplified pictures and stereotypes

One important aspect of intercultural learning is to provide the students with *many* examples of 'the other', and to underline the diversity of all cultures. Since English is spoken and can be used in all corners of the world, this opens for the presentation of a great variety of countries and contexts and, as we have seen in earlier sections, today's textbooks do this. Still, the ways in which different cultures are presented indicate many challenges, but also many opportunities, related to such an undertaking.

One challenge seems to be related exactly to the fact that textbooks sweep over large parts of the world in a limited number of texts. Many cultural groups are presented in one text only, and the pictures that are provided are sometimes fragmentary, one-sided and superficial.

Flight provides many examples of texts that should probably be avoided in future textbooks for the teaching of English. Here, Hispanics are presented only as people who try to cross the Mexican border illegally (*Flight 9*: 70). Haitians appear in

a text about a man who 'escapes' to Florida (*Flight 9 WB*: 65) and Eskimos are involved only in a text about a man who survives after several days on a floating piece of ice (*Flight 10 WB*: 142). But *Flight* also exemplifies how one-sided and biased pictures can be provided even if a group of people is given more extensive coverage. This is particularly striking in the presentation of British people where, as indicated in section 7.2.1, a large number of the texts involve criminals.

Another challenge is related to the amount of background information and explanation that is needed in order for students to be able to understand the content of the texts. This is, of course, an issue that needs to be addressed whenever foreign cultures are presented, but it has particular relevance when students are confronted with cultures that differ considerably from their own. The text 'Jasmine', which was mentioned in section 7.3.3, is an obvious example of a text that requires substantial background information not only in order for students to understand the logic of the situation described, but also as a measure to counteract ethnocentric interpretations and reactions (*NPNP 3*: 96-100).

The textbook series provide examples of the tendency to present foreign cultures only in terms of their most exotic characteristics, and to favor texts that convey a consumer attitude to foreign countries. This can be seen, for example, in the primary focus on Zimbabwe and Australia as tourist destinations and the emphasis that is attached to the presentation of Aborigines and Native Americans rather than to other parts of the Australian and American population.

Such a strategy can, of course, provide a motivating content and it may also link up with some of the students' previous knowledge about the country in question. At the same time, there is certainly reason to warn against presentations that resemble glossy travel brochures and that strengthen rather than challenge possible misconceptions that students may have.

Scottish people seem to represent a particular challenge when it comes to avoiding stereotypes in the presentation of people in the English-speaking world. It must be concluded that the investigated textbooks fall into a well-known pattern here, as they include many texts that present Scots only in terms of bagpipes, kilts,

traditional highland games and stinginess (*Flight 8 TG*: 38; *NPNP 1 TG*: 60; *Search 9*: 196-197; *Flight 8 WB*: 189).

But one of the textbook series, *Search*, indicates interesting ways in which stereotypes can be addressed and worked with in order to develop the students' awareness of them. First of all, students are sometimes reminded to beware of simplifications and stereotypes when reading about other nationalities. In the teacher's guide, the authors state repeatedly that they wish to make the students aware of their possible prejudiced views, and to influence and 'disturb' these (eg *Search 8 TG*: 9; ibid: 38-39).

One approach that is used in *Search* is to present jokes that the Irish, the Scots, the Welsh and the English tell about one another (*Search 10*: 208-209; *Search 10 TG*: 93; ibid: 170). Students learn about some common stereotypes but, since the information is conveyed in the form of jokes and since it is linked to exercises that encourage the students to tell their own jokes, an impression is given of how silly these stereotypes are.

Other types of texts could, of course, also be used in order to address the problem of stereotypes. One example has already been mentioned (in section 9.2), namely the fictional text about the British boy who is confronted with his own preconceived ideas of French exchange students. Another example can be seen in *Catch*, where a satiric text by Art Buchwald describes the way people tend to categorize members of other nations – such as the Japanese, the Germans and the Russians - as collectively 'good' or 'bad', depending on the context (*Catch 10*: 157-159).

Another approach that *Search* uses is to present stereotyped views that some foreigners have of Norwegians. In one short text, young foreign immigrants to Norway tell us what they think Norwegians are like:

Norwegians:
- drink too much
- smoke too much
        - especially the women
- drink milk and eat potatoes…. (*Search 8*: 7).

After the text, students are asked the following question:

> Why do you think [these foreign students] have made these statements?
> Is it possible to say what other nationalities are like? (*Search 8*: 8)

This seems to be a simple, yet effective way of bringing perceived cultural differences to the fore, and also to show how absurd it may be to attach cultural characteristics collectively to a whole group of people. Texts and tasks like these, then, could be said to represent a fruitful approach when it comes to discussing and exploring cultural differences and addressing preconceptions that people may have about one another.

9.3.2 The presentation of 'us' and 'them'

One prerequisite for trying to come to grips with 'the other' is, of course, to reflect on the ways in which 'we' and 'they' are defined in a given context. In the investigated textbooks, 'we' are, naturally, defined as teachers and learners of English and users of the textbook at hand. But the understanding also seems to be conveyed that 'we' are a homogenous group of people who share the same cultural background and frames of reference. This can be seen both in the few texts and tasks that are related to Norwegian cultural traits and in the fact that very few questions and exercises encourage the students to explore the diversity of their own classroom and their own environment.

The other material in the textbooks contributes to the definition of 'us' and 'the other' as well. The heavy emphasis on topics that are, first and foremost, associated with the interests and concerns of the typical Western teenager, the large amount of texts that present aspects of British and American 'big C culture' and the presentation of popular tourist destinations are all important factors here. It can therefore be argued that future textbooks for the teaching of English ought to try to break with the tradition of looking at the world merely from a Western point of view. Work with multiple perspectives will not only open for valuable intercultural learning, but it may also create better opportunities for all students in an increasingly diversified student body to find a place for themselves in the teaching and learning situation.

One text in *Catch* indicates a possible approach when it comes to drawing the students' attention to the different ways in which 'we' and 'they' can be defined, depending on whose glasses one has on. 'My Dangerous Spring in Kiev' has to do with the Chernobyl disaster, and it is told by an American student of Russian. The text

has a happy ending in the way that all the foreign students are evacuated from the contaminated region and flown out to the Western world. However, the narrator's ethnocentric attitudes become quite conspicuous as she makes no mention of the Russians who have to stay behind (*Catch 10*: 82-83).

As long as a story is told by someone from one's own culture, the bias and the limitations that are embedded in the narrator's point of view may be difficult to detect. When the perspective is that of someone else, however, it may be easier to see how we all tend to define 'us' as occupying the center of the universe, and as being much more important than 'them'. Although *Catch* does not encourage students to do so, 'My Dangerous Spring in Kiev' could be said to constitute an excellent starting point for students to reflect on these questions.

9.3.3 Taking the other's perspective

It was argued in section 3.4.1 that a crucial issue in any communication situation is the interlocutors' willingness and ability to be 'mindful' and try to take the other person's perspective. Information about this aspect of intercultural (or interdiscourse) communication seems to be a natural part of any foreign language course. It seems obvious, however, that much input and practice is needed in order to develop students' ability to be 'mindful'. One possible approach could lie in texts that are designed so that they present multiple perspectives, ie 'discursive' texts.[109] But practical experience in the form of exercises that focus on possible misunderstandings and / or the shifting of perspectives would, clearly, also be useful.

The textbook series include quite a few exercises that ask students to tell a story from someone else's point of view. One example of such an exercise is when the students are asked to tell the story mentioned earlier about the exchange students who come to England the way one of the French students would have told it (*NPNP 3*: 168-171). Another example can be found in *Catch*, when the students are asked to tell the story of the American high school student Philip Malloy mentioned in section 7.3.2 from the perspective of his English teacher, his track coach and a girl in his class (*Catch 10*: 128). Although the intention with these exercises is language production

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[109] Discursive texts are described in section 3.6.3 and are discussed further in section 10.2.1.

rather than cultural awareness, they do provide opportunities for the students to see that any situation can be understood and experienced in several different ways.

Some of the texts that provide historical information are also equipped with exercises that ask the students to see the issue from another perspective. This happens, for example, in connection with the text 'Don't ride the bus on Monday' which relates the story of Rosa Parks and the start of the Montgomery bus boycott. On the basis of the information given, the students are asked to tell the story from the bus-driver's and one of the passenger's point of view (*Catch 10*: 43).[110]

Exercises like these may be useful when it comes to helping students see that a cultural conflict always has at least two sides. At the same time, the exercises indicate the importance of background information in order for students to be able to take the perspective of 'the other'. If little or no background information is provided, such exercises could be said to encourage guess work and statements about 'the other' that are based on very limited knowledge and, possibly, simplified and even prejudiced preconceptions.

A few exercises illustrate my point. One is attached to a text about a young boy who lives in the streets of Bombay, and the students are asked to do the following:

> Interview Mohammed about his day. What he does when he wakes up in the morning, how he spends his days, how he gets his food, where he sleeps etc (*NPNP 3*: 93).

The text that precedes this exercise provides no information that can help students answer these questions in a way that corresponds to Mohammed's real experience. A similar exercise can be found in *Catch*, where students are asked to tell the story of a young immigrant to Norway, Tsige. A picture shows that Tsige is black, but no information is given about her country of origin or her past history (*Catch 10*: 38). Since exercises like these indicate that very little background information is needed in order to tell the stories of 'the other', they must be said to run the risk of perpetuating and consolidating rather than challenging possible ethnocentric views and prejudiced pictures that the students may have.

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[110] A few other examples can be given as well. In *Search*, students are asked to rewrite a Ku Klux Klan poster the way it could have been written by black people (*Search 10*: 172). After having read a white settler's description of an encounter with hostile 'Indians', students are encouraged to retell the story from the Indians' perspective (*NPNP 2*: 151).

The challenge of trying to imagine a situation other than one's own while, necessarily, having to rely on one's own background knowledge and experience can also be illustrated by one of the few role plays that have to do with intercultural issues. Role cards are made for four family members who are going to discuss whether or not they want to emigrate to the United States:

> Your family has just received a letter from relatives who have moved to California. They love the place. They have bought a big house on the coast south of Los Angeles. Now they want your family to emigrate, too. You (mother, father, daughter 16 and son 15) discuss this around the dinner table (*Search 9 TG*: 137).

Each family member gets brief instructions about their opinion. The father, who is a doctor, thinks he will be able to get a better job in California, and the daughter would also 'love to live in California. The sun and the beaches, rich and famous people everywhere'. While such role plays could be seen as rather harmless in the way that they only encourage language practice in a fictitious situation, they could certainly also be criticized on the grounds that they promote a very simplified and biased view of a very complex issue.

9.3.4 'The other' in terms of language and language use

Any foreign language textbook can, of course, be said to present 'the other' in terms of language and language use. However, as already indicated in previous chapters, different approaches can be used when it comes to drawing the students' attention to the diversity and the 'otherness' of the foreign language.

Two different concerns seem to be involved here. On the one hand, there is an obvious need to make the foreign language learning task manageable for the students by narrowing down the challenges that are involved. From this perspective, it would be natural to focus on the similarities rather than on the differences between the native and the new language, and to limit the exposure that students get to the diversity of the foreign language. On the other hand, there is an equally important need to make students aware of the fact that different languages represent different ways of thinking and talking, to prepare them to cope with these differences and also to contribute to the development of the students' own ways of looking at and understanding the world.

From this perspective, it would be natural to draw the students' attention to the differences between the two languages, and to address the challenges and the opportunities that the diversity and the 'otherness' of the foreign language represent.

As indicated in previous sections, today's textbooks have settled for an approach where the texts for reading and listening expose the learners to a rich variety of English and English language use. In the commentaries to the texts and the exercise material, however, little attention is paid to the many examples that the texts provide of language and language use that seem to have no direct equivalents in Norwegian. Students are rarely encouraged to explore the many possible meanings that a text may have, and no great importance is attached to encouraging students to try out words, phrases and conventions of language use that do not correspond closely to their own language.

It could be argued that the textbooks have found a balancing point here, in making the students' task manageable without depriving them of the opportunity to experience and learn from a variety of realizations of the foreign language. At the same time, in failing to focus on the differences between the two languages, the textbooks can be said to reduce some of the possibilities that foreign language learning provides for new and enriching experiences and also to obscure the challenges that communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries may involve.

As indicated in Chapter 8, there are many ways in which the students' attention can be drawn to the 'otherness' and the diversity of the foreign language. Obvious sources of insight are the textbook texts and also the experience that the students have with English outside the classroom. Differences in vocabulary, expressions and conventions of language use are central issues here.

Commentaries to the texts, exercises and activities are, of course, central when it comes to pointing out and following up the different meanings that the foreign language may give rise to. But the glossaries and the explanations of words and phrases also have an important role to play, and the textbooks provide examples of different approaches that can be used.

Most of the English vocabulary is, naturally, translated into Norwegian in word lists in the back of the textbook or in lists that accompany each text. Whenever the

English word corresponds to a Norwegian word that has the same meaning, this seems to be an unproblematic thing to do. Sometimes, however, translations have been provided that narrow down the meaning of the English word. When *doughnut* is translated with 'smultring' (*NPNP 2*: 216) and *custard pie* becomes 'bløtkake' (*Flight 8*: 190), the textbooks can be said to promote the view that foreign words and concepts can all be understood within the students' own perceptual framework.[111] With such a strategy, students may well get the impression that languages are, essentially, the same, and that learning a foreign language is basically a question of learning new words for the same concepts.

On other occasions, it is indicated that there is no one-to-one equivalence in the meaning of words. In connection with a text about a British school, for example, the word 'mobiles' is explained like this:

> **Mobiles** … *flyttbare brakker* (in some schools in Britain they have extra classrooms in temporary buildings) (*Catch 8*: 12).

Of course, the texts in which the vocabulary is used cast light on the meaning potential that many words have. Nevertheless, it is obvious that word lists and commentaries that provide further explanations of the significance and special uses of certain words can add much to the students' understanding and to their cultural insight as well. When reading about a *head girl* in a British school, for example, students could be told about the thinking that goes along with such a term (*New People, New Places 1*: 165). In addition to having the word *cheerleader* translated as 'leder av heiagjeng' ('the leader of a cheering crowd'), students could be informed about the cultural impact that cheerleaders have in American society (*Flight 9*: 182).

9.4 Summary and discussion

Intercultural learning can be summed up as having to do with the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable people to behave in an open-minded and flexible manner in encounters with people from a different cultural background. The English syllabus in *L-97* seems to point to the need for intercultural learning when

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[111] The Norwegian words used here refer to baked goods that are closely associated with Norwegian culture.

it refers to the development of the students' ability to 'communicate across cultural divides' (C-*99*: 239).

However, it must be concluded that the investigated textbooks make few explicit attempts to develop this kind of ability in the students and that they attach, on the whole, very little importance to intercultural issues. Although the textbook texts provide information about and encounters with many foreign people and cultures, students are hardly ever encouraged to make use of the texts' potential for intercultural learning.

Intercultural learning can hardly happen without the presentation of 'the other' and without reflection on the differences between cultures. In future textbooks for the teaching of English, then, there seems to be good reason to provide students with encounters with 'real others' and also to make the different cultural expressions visible for them. A central concern would be to avoid texts that present seemingly 'culture-neutral' contexts or refer to situations as if they were universally valid. It is also important to provide the students with sufficient, balanced information so that they can be able to understand and relate in a constructive way to the pictures that they are given of 'the other'.

Descriptions of cultural encounters can be seen to constitute particularly useful starting points for the students' investigation of and reflection on the challenges that such encounters may entail. Most of the texts in present-day textbooks that describe cultural encounters are fictional texts. These are powerful descriptions, and there may be many good reasons to include such texts in future textbooks, too. However, it could be argued that more non-fictional texts could also involve people who meet across cultural borders. Moreover, there seems to be a need to include more descriptions of situations in which members of the students' own culture are involved and to illustrate contexts where the students might be likely to find themselves.

A central concern in intercultural learning would be to prepare students for the great diversity of cultural expressions that they may encounter when they use English as a foreign language. In order to do so it is, of course, necessary to show them some of the variety of the English-speaking world. But the diversity of each country and each community also needs to be focused on. While some of the texts in today's books

show simplified pictures and rather biased renderings of people in other countries, this should, clearly, be avoided in the future. The students' own culture is also an issue at stake here. Rather than providing the impression that all Norwegian students share the same cultural background, the diversity of the students' own environment could be focused on and made the topic of intercultural work.

In order to draw the students' attention to the fact that all cultures are many-faceted and varied, it could be argued that stereotypes should be avoided. At the same time, since stereotypes are very common and, since the students obviously have many preconceptions about the people and the countries that the textbook materials present, it may be important to address, work with and 'disturb' stereotypes. *Search* includes quite a few examples of how this can be done. This textbook series also presents some of the simplified views that foreigners have of Norwegians, and a few exercises encourage students to see themselves from an outsider's perspective. Such an approach seems particularly fruitful in work that aims to open the students' eyes to new ways of looking at and understanding the world.

Another possible approach to intercultural learning can be seen in some exercises that ask students to tell a story from a perspective that is different from the one in the text. In today's textbooks, these exercises have apparently been included only in order to encourage language production, but they could, clearly, be developed in such a way that students can be made aware both of the need to practice taking someone else's perspective and of the difficulties involved in doing so.

The investigated textbooks cannot be said to prepare students for the difficulties in understanding 'the other' that, inevitably, will occur. On the contrary, both texts and tasks give the impression that speakers of English, native as well as non-native, experience few – if any - problems when communicating. Information is always seen to be exchanged without problems and misunderstandings do not seem to exist.

Future textbooks can therefore be said to have a job to do in including texts and tasks that aim explicitly at developing the students' willingness to meet 'the other' and their ability to cope with the misunderstandings that this may involve. As indicated in section 3.6.2, the field of intercultural education suggests many activities that can be adapted to the foreign language situation, such as the ethnographic investigation of

texts, role plays and simulations. There are, clearly, many possibilities for valuable intercultural learning here, in exercises and activities that let the students practice the foreign language at the same time as their attention is drawn to the need to try to understand 'the other', to take his or her perspective and to try to be 'mindful' in communication situations.

10 The students' positions

This chapter follows up the argument presented in Chapter 3 about the need to find a balance between school authority and learner autonomy. One aspect of this issue is the motivation factor of allowing students to choose approaches, topics and materials according to their own interests and perceived needs. Another - and equally important - aspect is the view that, in order for learning to happen at all, students need to become personally involved in and take charge of their own work with the foreign language. Thus, section 10.1 looks into the opportunities for students' choice that textbooks can provide, while section 10.2 looks at different types of texts and exercises and the ways in which students can be encouraged to 'enter a dialogue' with the material.

I also argued in Chapter 3 for the need to let learners develop their own voice and to be encouraged to reflect on and define their own positions as users of English. While there is an obvious motivation factor here, too, it can be argued that foreign language – and culture – learning does not make much sense unless the students are addressed on a personal level and encouraged to use the foreign language to express their own individual concerns, views and opinions and to reflect on and prepare themselves for the roles and positions that they want to adopt as users of the foreign language. Section 10.3 follows up these perspectives by looking at the roles that a textbook can, directly or indirectly, make available for the learners.

10.1 Possibilities for the students' choice

In the 1997 English syllabus, the need for students to be able to choose their own approaches to the learning of English is mentioned repeatedly, and 'knowledge of one's own language learning' is presented as one of four main areas of study. In today's textbooks, this aspect of the English course is followed up in very different ways, and many different possibilities - but also certain obstacles - can be seen when it comes to encouraging and making students able to make their own choices.

The main opportunities for students' choice in today's textbooks can be found in the great variety of texts and tasks that they provide. I will discuss the texts first and return to the possibilities for choice that the exercise material represents later in this section.

There are short texts and long texts, easy and more difficult ones, and students will have few problems finding texts that suit their own level of language proficiency. Different strategies are used in order to make the choices visible for the students. In *Flight* and *New People, New Places* each chapter consists of four texts, labeled A – D. Teachers are informed in the teacher's guides that the A and B texts are supposed to constitute the core material for the whole class, while the C and D texts are meant only for those who can handle them (see eg *NPNP 1 TG*: 10-14). In *Search* and *Catch*, many of the texts are presented at two (and sometimes even three) levels of difficulty, and the students are encouraged (in introductions to the texts) to choose their own level. In *Search*, each chapter consists of many, short texts in addition to some long ones (nine on average), and the intention is, clearly, to provide students with differentiated material to choose from.

In this way, the textbooks all communicate that there is a need for each individual student to consider the level of difficulty that will suit him or her best. When it comes to the content of the texts, however, the students are given fewer opportunities for choice. One obvious explanation for this could lie in the curricular requirements and the school's authority to impose certain texts and topics on the students. But it is worth remembering that, although the English syllabus in *L-97* suggests a number of texts and topics, few absolute requirements are presented (see section 5.2.1).

It has already been shown that a main concern both in the syllabus and the textbooks is to present topics that may interest the students and thus motivate them for work with the language. When this is the case, it would seem natural if these efforts were followed up and the textbooks opened up for students to have some say in the selection of relevant topics. But only the prefaces to the *Search* textbooks mention that the texts, tasks and ideas for project work in the books must be seen as suggestions, and that students should feel free to find additional and / or alternative materials:

> Use your own imagination, find other texts and make your own tasks.
> That will make it more fun to learn English. Good luck! (*Search 8*: 3).

In the other textbook series, the topics that the chapters deal with appear as a 'given' in the students' work with English. Students and teachers are reminded (in the teacher's

guides and the prefaces to each textbook /workbook) that they need to select the texts and tasks that they find most useful, but nothing is said about the need for students to reflect on the types of content that they may find interesting and relevant or about the importance of looking beyond the textbook for appropriate and useful teaching materials.

As mentioned in section 6.1.1, the textbooks have between seven (*New People, New Places 1-3*) and eleven (*Search 8*) chapters, and each chapter focuses on one particular topic. It can be argued that the organization of teaching materials into units that deal with one topic or theme represents, in itself, a restriction of the students' possibilities to choose a content that they may find worthwhile and interesting to work with. Buckmaster (1999) argues that such an organization is 'absurd' in the way that it provides a very limited scope for the students' work, and also in the way that it assumes that students will be motivated to work on one and the same topic for several weeks. Rather than presenting texts and tasks that are related to a limited number of topics in long, monolithic units, he says, textbooks ought to provide 'an embarrassment of riches' that allow for more flexibility in the students' work (ibid: 58). Buckmaster could certainly be said to make a valid point when he calls for future textbooks for the teaching of English to be less linear and seemingly 'prepackaged' in order to represent a better starting point for both the teachers' and the students' own choice of materials.

The main opportunity for students to choose their own topics and procedures can be found in the suggestions for project work and extra writing which are included in most chapters. Especially in *Search*, the importance of project work is emphasized. Each chapter ends with a section that opens for such work and many, broad topic areas are mentioned. Thus, an encouragement for students to limit the scope and find a focus that interests them seems to be implied. In *Search,* there are also constant reminders that 'you may, of course, find your own topic related to this chapter', and the students are expected to choose their own ways of working with and presenting the project as well.

In the other textbook series, practically all ideas for writing and project work are linked directly to the topic that the chapter deals with and students are, most often,

asked to 'find out more about' a person, an issue or an event that has already been referred to in the textbook texts. While it is natural to link activities to the materials that the textbook offers, one could also wish for tasks to be included that encourage students to define their own area of interest and to work with topics that the books do not cover.

In connection with the topics that are suggested for extra work, some learning sources outside the textbook are mentioned, such as song lyrics, newspapers and materials that can be obtained from foreign countries' embassies (eg *Search 9*: 80; *Catch 8*: 113; *Flight 8 WB*: 188). *New People, New Places* uses a standard reference to 'reference books, E-mail, Internet or CD-ROM' whenever project work is mentioned.

But it is clear that, in order to help students find texts and materials that may link up with their own experience and with the ways in which English is used in the world outside the classroom, other and more frequent references could be given. Many obvious opportunities could be mentioned, not least in connection with Norwegian students' considerable exposure to British and American popular culture. Two exercises in *New People, New Places* indicate an area that can be said to represent a limitless source for learning:

> Choose a scene from a film you remember well. Write the dialogue. [...] (Group work) Choose a scene from a film or a commercial that you know. Choose a role each and act it out (*NPNP 2*: 158).

It could, of course, be argued that textbook authors' job is to compile texts that can be presented in a textbook, and that it must be up to the teacher and the students to find and to make use of additional texts and materials. For most Norwegian teenagers it would be relatively easy to provide examples of English in movies, song lyrics, football magazines and other publications that deal with topics that interest them.

However, since the textbook is often seen to provide both the structure and the content of a course, it seems important that it points to examples of possible additional or even alternative texts, and also that it indicates how these texts can be worked with. On the one hand, such references could help legitimize materials outside the textbook as relevant and useful in the students' work with the language. On the other hand, it would probably add to the credibility of the course as well as to the students'

motivation for learning if a textbook indicated an awareness of the materials that exist in the students' lives outside the classroom and also provided relevant and frequent links with the students' own experience.

When it comes to the exercise material for language practice and language use, today's textbooks offer ample amounts and it is obvious that teachers and / or students need to make a selection. However, little importance is attached to helping students (and teachers) make conscious and constructive choices, and it could be argued that more efforts ought to be made when it comes to developing the students' insight into their own needs and preferred learning strategies. In connection with six exercises that follow an excerpt from Roald Dahl's *Matilda, Catch* indicates how such issues could be addressed:

> Choose at least two of the tasks here. Look through the exercises, then choose which ones you'd like to do. Write a note to your teacher, giving reasons for your choice. Write: "I've chosen …because…" (*Catch 8*: 31).

In some of the textbooks (*New People, New Places* in particular) the exercise material is grouped under the same headings throughout the textbooks, and it is communicated quite clearly what it is that each type of exercise aims to do. Such a strategy can, of course, be said to facilitate the selection process, but it can also be criticized for giving the impression that only a limited number of exercise types exist, and that the selection process can happen rather mechanically.

The same criticism can be directed towards the forms that students are offered as help when planning their work with each chapter. Both *Flight* and *New People, New Places* present photo-copyable originals of such forms in the teacher's guides. Here, students are encouraged simply to list the compulsory parts of each chapter and the parts that they have decided to do as extra work. While these lists undoubtably can help students organize and plan their work (and also help teachers supervise the students' efforts), they do not seem very fruitful when it comes to increasing the students' awareness of their own learning strategies.

Some information about the different exercises is given in the teacher's guides, and the teachers' expertise and insight will, of course, represent an important factor when it comes to helping students make choices that work for them. Still, it seems that

both students and teachers would have benefited from more guidance in the selection process.

When asking students to choose among a given number of exercises, it would seem natural to present some of the principles that can guide their work. The students' attention could, for example, be drawn to the need to work with all the four skills, to include both guided and free exercises and last, but not least, to avoid always choosing the same type of exercise.

The main concern when trying to help students make conscious and useful choices must be to encourage them to reflect actively on the work that they do and the effect that it seems to have. Sporadic attempts to do so can be seen in today's textbooks. In *Search*, students are given a series of questions at the end of the first chapter in each textbook, and it could be argued that students ought to be confronted with questions such as these continually, throughout the course:

> Questions to ask yourself:
> 1 How well do I know English?
> Write a list of
> a   what you are good at.
> b   what you want to improve.
> c   what you enjoy doing in your English lessons.
> (eg *Search 9*: 28)

Two of the other textbook series signal that assessment of the students' work ought to happen at the end of each chapter, and photo-copyable originals in the teacher's guides are included for this purpose. While the questions in *New People, New Places* indicate that a main intention with them is to check which parts of the chapter the students have covered, the questions in *Flight* focus on the students' own reflections:

> 1   Did you do all the exercises you had planned to do?
>   (Yes, and more. Yes. No)
> 2   If *no*, why not?
> 3   What new things did you learn in this chapter?
> 4   I am good at:
> 5   I still need more practice in:
>   Teacher's comment (eg *Flight 8 TG*: 13).

Questions like these can probably help students become aware of the knowledge, skills and insight that they want to and need to develop and also encourage them to reflect on

the choices that they have made. If questions and assessment sheets like these are used actively, then, they could constitute a very useful point of reference in the students' ongoing work to define and redefine their course of action as well as in the dialogue that needs to be kept going between the student and the teacher.

Apart from the ideas for writing and project work mentioned earlier, there are few, if any, reminders that students can formulate their own tasks. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that teachers and students can see opportunities for additional or alternative activities in the students' work with the language. Nevertheless, present-day textbooks can certainly be criticized for providing students with a rather closed 'world of exercises' (Säljö 2000), and there seem to be good reasons for future textbooks to attach more emphasis to the fact that there are a great many possible ways in which a foreign language can be learned, and that a textbook, necessarily, provides examples only of a few of them.

10.2 Linking up with the students' own contexts

10.2.1 Different types of texts

A natural strategy when trying to find texts that students will be able to relate to and 'reconnect' to their own contexts is, of course, to look for a content that seems relevant to them. Thus, as shown in earlier chapters, many of the texts in today's textbooks take up typical teenage concerns. However, the whole point of teaching a foreign language is to open up new worlds for the learners and to help them get access to experiences and insights that they did not have before. New information and new perspectives are also necessary in order to prepare students for language use in situational and cultural contexts that they are not already familiar with. How, then, can students be helped to make sense of the new material that they are exposed to in a foreign language course?

The ways in which questions, exercises and activities encourage and help students to work with the material are, of course, crucial here. But the text types in which the new material is presented can also have an important role to play. As mentioned in section 3.6.3, the distinction between ostensive, narrative and discursive texts can be useful in order to illustrate the ways in which different types of texts seem to encourage different types of student response.

Ostensive texts, in Selander's (1995) terminology, present information about an issue in such a way that it comes across as true and indisputable. Such texts have been very common in school textbooks, and reflect the view that central, 'objective' information about the world simply needs to be passed on to new generations of learners. Texts that present a narrative, on the other hand, seem to open for more individual response and personal interaction with the text. Discursive texts present an issue by way of several perspectives and discuss facts by providing arguments and counter-arguments. These texts invite readers to reflect on an issue and to become actively involved in their own meaning making.

With today's emphasis on the learner as an active agent in his or her own learning process, it might seem natural to avoid the use of ostensive texts altogether. But this, of course, is too hasty a conclusion. Clearly, the use of ostensive texts can be justified when students are to be provided with relevant and useful information that *is* true and indisputable. The text 'Who are the British', which was mentioned in section 7.2.10, can serve as an example of this:

> **Great Britain** is the name of the island which is made up of England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is not part of Great Britain.
> **The United Kingdom** is the name used for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
> **The British Isles** is the name which refers to all the islands; Great Britain, Ireland (the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland), the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Channel islands
> **The British** are not only people from England, Scotland and Wales. They come from all over the world. […] (*Search 8*: 14)

It can, in fact, be argued that future textbooks ought to include more, basic information that can help students learn about central concepts and become aware of relevant issues in situations of foreign language use. Such information can be related both to specific language communities and to communication situations in general. Provided that the texts are relatively easily accessible and that exercises and activities encourage the learners to work with, relate to and understand the information that is presented, ostensive texts may be well suited to present such material.

Still, there is reason to beware of the fact that the density of information can make ostensive texts quite difficult to read. *Search*, in particular, includes many such

texts that, despite the fact that they deal with presumably interesting topics such as Australian animals, cartoons and sports, seem to be quite difficult to read and understand. The example below shows a text about baseball:

> Baseball is widely regarded as America's national game. It is played with a hard ball and a bat between two teams of nine players each. It is a very popular sport and has millions of loyal fans in the USA and in other parts of the world. Although first played by children and amateurs, it is the professional baseball teams which today attract thousands of people to the stadiums and make millions of Americans follow the games on TV. Baseball as it is played today, developed in North America in the early 1800s, but the origins of the sport can be traced back to ancient cultures in Persia and Egypt […] (*Search 9*: 188-189)

In texts such as these, every sentence conveys new, important information. There are few repetitions and 'fillers', and the context does not contribute much to the readers' understanding of new words and phrases. Also, there is most often no personal voice that can comment on the information that is given and help establish a relationship between the reader and the text.

In today's textbooks, many topics that the learners probably are unfamiliar with are presented in ostensive texts. Indian history, for example, is presented by way of a 'timeline' that simply lists highlights in Indian history without placing the events in a larger context or explaining the impact that they have (*Search 9*: 214-215). These texts seem to violate the principle of presenting information that students may have problems linking up with previous knowledge or experience in texts that are easily accessible from a linguistic point of view (Widdowson 1990; see section 3.5.1). The result may well be that the texts contribute neither to the students' knowledge nor to their language learning, and it seems obvious that such texts ought to be avoided in textbooks in the future.

When it comes to narrative texts, it has already been pointed out how the many fictional texts that are included provide students with personal encounters with other people and also with valuable information about foreign countries and contexts. However, while today's textbooks use fictional texts, first and foremost, as the basis for reading comprehension questions and language practice exercises, producers of future textbooks could be advised to make better use of such texts. As Fenner (2001)

points out, fictional texts represent a 'cultural meeting point' that may trigger a variety of responses from the readers, and questions and activities should, clearly, encourage students to explore and reflect on the many different meanings that they can give rise to.

Today's textbooks also often present factual information by way of a narrative text, obviously in order to make the material more easily accessible for the students. One example is the series of postcards that a Norwegian girl writes from her trip to the United States (*Catch 8*: 168 - 171). The information that these texts provide about the four states that she visits seems to be easy to understand, since it is presented by a personal voice in a narrative form.

Other texts, however, indicate that the narrative form does not, in itself, guarantee that the content of a text will be easily accessible. This can be seen, first and foremost, in the texts that present a historical event or a historical person. One text that deals with the partition of India, for example, seems quite difficult to understand although it is told by way of a 15 year-old boy's experiences (*Search 9*: 218). The presentation of Mary, Queen of Scots and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' are also given a narrative form but, as mentioned in section 7.2.1, the information density of these texts is still very high (*Catch 9*: 167-168; *NPNP 1*: 126-127).

Discursive texts can be seen as particularly useful in a foreign language course not only because they encourage students to 'enter a dialogue with' the subject matter that the texts present, but also because this process necessarily involves valuable use of the foreign language. What, then, do such texts look like? Although today's textbooks include few discursive texts, some examples can be given.

Some texts present an issue by way of different people's views of it. *Search 8* uses this approach when five youngsters talk about British school uniforms in five different texts (*Search 8*: 32-33). Since the youngsters have quite different experiences with and opinions about school uniforms, the readers get an impression of many aspects of this tradition.

Another example of such a 'cluster' of texts is presented under the heading 'Death Row'. A person who has committed a murder is sentenced to death, and the convict, his mother, his defense attorney, the victim's wife and a concerned citizen all

present their views of the death penalty. Very different opinions and arguments are given, and the texts form a good basis for the students' discussions and active development of their own opinions about an important issue (*Search 10*: 22-26).

Many of the chapters in *Search* are, clearly, built up with the intention of providing students with a many-faceted and varied presentation of an issue. The average chapter contains nine relatively short texts and, often, these texts cast light on the topic of the chapter from a number of different angles. In the chapter 'Growing up', for example, many different childhood experiences are described. Several texts are told from the parents' point of view, and the notions of childhood and adulthood are also presented in legal terms. In sum, this chapter conveys the impression that 'growing up' can mean a wide variety of different things, and the texts – along with a large number of exercises – provide many opportunities for the learners to reflect on the meanings that 'growing up' may have for them (*Search 9*: 5-25).

Some texts establish a dialogue with the reader by way of a narrator's voice that addresses the reader throughout the text and encourages him or her to reflect on the information that is provided. There are many such texts in *Search* which can be said to illustrate one way in which students can be helped to see that the perspectives presented in the text are not the only ones possible. In a text that has to do with British media, for example, the claim is made that British people's interest in newspapers is largely due to their enthusiasm for sport and betting. Then, a narrator's voice can be heard: 'Do you think this is true?' (*Search 9*: 163).

As argued in section 3.6.3, the authors of a textbook can have an important role to play when it comes to helping students become actively involved in a text and the content that it provides. In the texts that are written specifically for the textbook, the authors can make sure that a narrator's voice can be heard and that it is used to address the students and to constantly trigger their involvement. One text in *New People, New Places* can serve as an example of how this can be done. In part, this text can be classified as ostensive, as it presents the history and current status of English as a global language. However, the text also reminds the reader that there are many different opinions about English and its hegemony as a lingua franca. In the end, the

text leaves it up to the students to answer some of the central questions that the text raises:

> What will happen to English in the future? Will all the new kinds of English become one and the same? […] will English become the *only* language that is spoken in the world? (*NPNP 3*: 32)

10.2.2   Different types of exercises

It was argued in section 3.6.2 that foreign language education ought to move away from the tradition of providing students primarily with **'**closed' questions, ie questions that ask for one correct answer only. Instead, students ought to be provided with 'open' questions, ie questions that can have many possible answers and therefore appeal more to the students' independent reflection and creativity. It is believed that students will learn better if they are allowed to 'enter a dialogue' with the new material, and open questions are, of course, useful also in the way that they encourage active and meaningful language use.

How, then, can questions be formulated in such a way that they trigger the students' personal involvement and support their learning processes? Although present-day textbooks probably do not provide an exhaustive answer to this question, they do indicate many approaches that may be well worth considering when designing textbooks in the future. At the same time, the textbooks also illustrate that the tradition of encouraging rather mechanical and meaningless recapitulation of texts is still very much alive in the teaching of English in Norway.

Closed questions are used, first and foremost, in *Flight* and *New People, New Places,* where, as indicated in section 6.3.2, virtually every text for reading is followed by a series of comprehension questions. As the example below shows, most of the answers to these questions can be lifted directly from the text. Many other activities are also included that encourage rather mechanical recapitulation of the content of the texts, such as work with true / false statements, split sentences and fill-in exercises.

Often, the last one or two of the comprehension questions are open ones that address the students' own background experience and challenge them to express their own view on an issue. These questions are attached to a text about hamburgers and ketchup:

1. How did the Tartars make their hamburgers?
2. How was the Tartar steak brought to Europe?
3. How was it turned into a hamburger?
4. When was the hamburger called a "Salisbury steak"? Why?
[…]
9. Imagine you were allowed to eat only two types of food for a whole week. What would you choose? Why? (*Flight 8*: 68).

Many of these open questions can, of course, trigger interesting discussions both about the text and about related issues. Still, it seems problematic to present open questions only as an afterthought, after a long series of questions that do not encourage the students' own meaning making at all. Both in *Flight* and *New People, New Places* the central position and the large number of comprehension questions seem to signal that a primary concern in the course is to check that the students have read and understood the texts, while the students' own, personal use of the language has secondary importance only.

Some comprehension questions are formulated in such a way that students have to study the text quite carefully and even 'read between the lines' in order to answer them. After a text about a girl who tells about her experiences as an immigrant to the United States, for example, students are asked the following question:

Do you think Mathilde is in love? Give reasons for your answer (*NPNP 2*: 136).

Such questions can be referred to as 'inference questions' (Cooper 1986) and they, clearly, provide more food for thought than traditional comprehension questions do.

Catch introduces an interesting way of asking inference questions. One example of this can be seen in connection with a text about a British secondary school. After having read the text, students are first asked to write down five things that they know about Rudheath High. The next question asks them to write down five things that they *think* they know (*Catch 8*: 13). This formulation could be a useful one if one wants to draw the students' attention to the fact that any text or issue can be interpreted and understood in a number of different ways, and that there may always be reason to question one's own assumptions and conclusions.

Today's textbooks show that many comprehension questions focus on rather insignificant details. As argued in section 6.3.2, such a strategy is highly problematic

in the way that the students' attention is drawn to unimportant aspects of the text and also in the way that completely meaningless uses of the foreign language are suggested. Moreover, there is reason to believe that few students will find it motivating to work with such questions.

A much better strategy must be for future textbooks to focus on the interesting and important pieces of information that the texts convey, and to encourage students to reflect on and to express the meanings that the texts may have for them. Among today's textbook series, *Search* is the one that indicates most clearly how this can be done. Throughout these textbooks students are encouraged to work independently and creatively with the texts, and the message is conveyed that students are not only free to – but even expected to – understand the texts in their own, personal ways.

Search provides many alternatives to traditional comprehension questions when it comes to forcing students to examine a text closely. In connection with a chapter that provides large amounts of factual information about the United States, for example, students are given the following exercise:

> Work together in groups. Discuss and explain these words and expressions in English: "the Average American family", " the first colonists", "immigrants", "the road to opportunity", "three time zones", "Hollywood fame and fortune" (*Search 10*: 14).

Students are also asked to make paragraph headings, to write summaries, to retell the content of the text in their own words and to write a different beginning or ending to the story (eg *Search 8 TG*: 192). All of these, clearly, answer McRae's (1996) call for the use of 'the fifth skill', thinking, more than traditional comprehension questions do.

Even exercises that ask students to locate specific passages in a text leave room for the students' own interpretation. An example of this can be seen in an exercise that is attached to a poem about a boy's first day at school:

> Pick out five lines that show the boy's feelings on his first day at school (*Search 8*: 27).

In the teacher's guide, the authors of *Search* inform the teachers about the importance of letting students meet the textbook texts on their own terms. The teachers are also reminded to be loyal to this approach:

> It is important to give the students opportunities for an independent approach to the text. This means, in other words, that the teachers should not place him- or herself between the text and the student in order to 'digest' the text for the reader. If this is done, the opportunity for the students' personal experience of a text will disappear (*Search 8 TG*: 10).[112]

An important issue here is, of course, to make it possible for students to 'reconnect' the texts to their own contexts and to make use of their own, previous knowledge and experience when trying to make sense of the new material. As indicated in earlier chapters, today's textbooks' main strategy in order to make this happen is to let students work with topics that they are already familiar with and, presumably, interested in. However, there seems to be no need to make constant references to teenage concerns and to focus only on well-known issues to make students able to relate to the textbook materials.

Chances are that students are interested in and know about an infinite number of different things, and it would seem natural to activate and to make the most of this interest and this knowledge. One useful strategy here can be seen in *Flight* and *New People, New Places,* where the students' previous knowledge about and experience with an issue is often addressed in the introductions to a new chapter. Students are, for example, asked to sum up what they already know about British and American sports (*Flight 9*: 46), the conflict in Northern Ireland (*Flight 10*: 76), Australia (*NPNP 1*: 173) and Irish singers and rock groups (*NPNP 2*: 9).

Search shows how the students' own context and previous understanding can be activated by encouraging them to provide a personal response to the texts that they read. After an excerpt from Roald Dahl's *Boy* for example, students are given the following exercise:

> Write down your thoughts about the teacher's (master's) way of handling the two situations (*Search* 8: 32).

A basic principle in *Search* seems to be to challenge students, as often as possible, to express their reactions to and to take a stand on the issues that the texts deal with. Even well-known, canonized texts like the excerpts from *The Canterbury Tales* and Martin

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[112] My translation.

Luther King Jr's famous speech 'I have a dream' are followed by questions that ask for the students' opinions and reactions to them (*Search 8*: 75; *Search 9*: 35). The process of reflecting on the meanings that they find in the texts must, necessarily, happen with reference to the students' previous knowledge and experience, and questions like these can therefore be said to represent an obvious way in which students can be helped to connect the new material to their own contexts.

Search differs considerably from the other textbook series when it comes to the opportunities that students are given to develop and to express their own views and opinions.[113] In addition to the many exercises that challenge students to voice their own opinions orally, in group and class discussions, fifty of the 128 exercises for writing do so as well. In contrast, only five of the 69 exercises related to writing in *Flight* open for the students' personal views, and the question 'What is your opinion?' occurs only in one of them (Lia 2001).

As mentioned in section 7.4.1, the authors of *New People, New Places* argue in the teacher's guides for the need to let students present their own interpretations and their own reactions when they work with poetry. The authors claim that

> In this process, students produce English of their own free will, not because the teacher asks them to say a sentence, but because they feel the need to communicate something. […] One may experience that English is cried out loudly and clearly, and quite spontaneously (eg *NPNP 1 TG*: 19).

The implication is, of course, that it is much more motivating to work with the foreign language if one is allowed to work out and present one's own understanding of an issue and to express one's own views and opinions. Among today's textbook series, only *Search* applies this seemingly obvious insight to the students' work with *all* texts, but it would certainly seem like a good idea if future textbooks follow in *Search's* footsteps here.

10.3 The roles that students are offered

In discussing different types of exercises and activities, the previous section casts some light on ways in which students can be encouraged to develop and to speak with

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[113] This perspective is followed up in section 10.3.2.

their own voice as users of the foreign language. However, many other elements in a textbook also influence the possibilities that students are given to reflect on and to define their own positions vis-à-vis the foreign language, and the following sections investigate the different roles and the corresponding arenas of language use that today's textbooks seem to make available for the students. The roles that have been identified are: 'the language learner', 'the knowledgeable, opinionated person', 'the tourist', 'the native speaker' and 'the self'.

10.3.1   The language learner

The role of the language learner is, of course, an important and unavoidable part of the students' identities as users of the foreign language. As they enter new arenas of language use throughout their lives, students will always, to some extent, need to define themselves as language learners. Thus, skills related to the process of learning a foreign language and awareness of the opportunities and the challenges embedded in such a process will always be useful. However, the tendency that can be seen in present-day textbooks of limiting the students' many possible roles to that of the perpetual language learner seems neither productive nor motivating.

There are many elements in today's textbooks that, together, make the role of the language learner the most conspicuous one. It has already been indicated that most of the exercises in the textbooks are language practice activities that make sense only within an educational context. Students are rarely asked to take part in activities that resemble communication situations in 'the real world', and few attempts are made to point to and to prepare students for language use in specific situations and contexts outside the classroom (see eg section 8.2.2). The fact that the textbooks make few references to the students' experience with the English language outside the school situation also contributes to the impression that the relevance of English is linked, first and foremost, to the students' roles as language learners.

In this way, the textbooks can be criticized for presenting and dealing with English more as a school subject than as a language for communication in real life contexts. This can also be seen in the fact that very little is done to argue for the position of English as a subject in the Norwegian school system. English appears as a 'given' item on the students' agenda, and the youngsters are apparently expected to be

motivated for work with English simply because the school situation expects it of them. Hardly any references are made to the reasons why Norwegians need to learn English, and few attempts are made to link up with the students' own, personal ambitions when it comes to learning the language. One reason for this may, of course, be that the value of English language skills is considered to be obvious. Still, it seems strange that the textbooks do not point to and make better use of this situation.

It also seems strange that the textbooks refer, exclusively, to the educational context when trying to motivate students for work with the language. The preface in each textbook, for example, presents the book as a tool that will help the students to perform better as students of English. None of the prefaces mention the positive effects that knowledge of English will have on the students' lives outside the classroom. Even *Search,* which is the textbook series that attaches most importance to the students' development as active and independent users of English, does not make much of an effort to argue for this approach in terms of the students' own needs and interests.

Some of the references to the school context seem rather bizarre. In the preface to *New People, New Places 2*, for example, students are encouraged to keep themselves informed about the developments in the English-speaking world. This, they are told, will make it easier for them to do project work (*NPNP 2*: 3). In *Search*, teachers are informed that work with oral English should be intensified because the students now get both an oral and a written grade (*Search 9 TG*: 14). The authors also link the students' ability to express their own opinions primarily to the *L-97* requirements and the expectations that lie in the final exam (eg *Search 10 TG*: 18-19).

Most of the questions that encourage the students to reflect on the work they have done in the chapter and to make them aware of their own learning strategies are also linked to the students' situation as language learners and as achievers in the school context (see section 10.1). If formulated differently, however, these questions provide an obvious opportunity when it comes to encouraging students to reflect on the different roles that they may want to play in situations of 'real' language use outside the classroom.

It seems important in a foreign language textbook to maintain a double perspective on the students' work with the language. While students need to accept the

fact that language learning requires tedious practice and work with the language in simulated and seemingly 'artificial' situations, they also need to be shown how the foreign language is, first and foremost, a means for the exchange of meanings in situations of real communication. Such situations can – and should, of course, be created in the classroom, where students can use the foreign language to get their own ideas across. But it also seems natural for textbooks to point to situations outside the classroom, and indicate some of the many roles that can be available to the students there as users of the foreign language.

10.3.2   The knowledgeable, opinionated person

The 1997 National Curriculum states explicitly that the teaching of English does not only involve the training of skills, but it is also 'an educational process' (*C-99*: 237). The Norwegian word used is 'dannelse', which can be associated with a certain familiarity with 'high culture' (see section 2.1.2.3). The specific texts that are suggested for each year level in the curriculum can probably be linked to this intention of contributing to the students' 'dannelse'. As we have seen, the textbooks follow up these curricular requirements and include many texts from the literary canon of the United Kingdom and the United States. Although *L-97* does not require that it be done, the textbooks also provide large amounts of information related to the history and national cultural heritage of the two countries. There are many suggestions for further work that encourage students to go more deeply into some of the topics as well. In this way, the textbooks signal that they intend to prepare the students for the role of a knowledgeable person.

At the same time, the textbooks indicate that there is no consistent understanding of the role and the importance that the knowledge dimension is supposed to have in the teaching of English in Norway. In *Flight,* for example, the impression is given that the books aim to entertain the students and to appeal to their interests just as much as they aim to provide them with new knowledge (see eg sections 6.2.5 and 7.2.2). Little emphasis seems to be attached to the development of the students' knowledge in *Catch* as well. Although these textbooks present large amounts of cultural information, the commentaries to the texts and the exercise material focus almost exclusively on linguistic aspects of the texts.

As indicated in section 7.2.10, the seemingly arbitrary selection of topics can also be said to undermine the perceived importance of the information that is provided. A great variety of topics is presented and, while many topics clearly occupy a central position in the foreign country's history and in the foreign people's 'collective cultural identity', others do not.[114] The authors, however, introduce the topics as if they are all equally relevant.

A rather bizarre result of this can be seen in the *Catch* teacher's guides, where goals are presented for all the texts. The goal formulations are, clearly, derived from the texts, rather than vice versa, and teachers are told that that the aim of the lesson is to provide students with knowledge about topics such as judo, about the training of police officers in England and about Norwegian immigration regulations (*Catch 10 TG*: 73; ibid: 120; ibid: 27).

As Chapter 7 shows, *Search* is the textbook series that, by far, makes the most consistent efforts to develop the students' knowledge about historical as well as contemporary issues. Some of the information answers the call for students to be informed about the most central aspects of the foreign people's 'collective cultural identity', but a great variety of other topics have been included as well. An even more significant difference between *Search* and the other textbook series lies in the great importance that *Search* attaches to the development of the students' own points of view and also of their willingness to voice them. Throughout the *Search* textbooks, students are challenged to take a stand on a great number of issues and to express their opinions in a variety of genres. *Search,* then, is the textbook series that shows most clearly how a foreign language textbook can aim not only to produce knowledgeable students but also to encourage the development of opinionated, active and independent members of society.

10.3.3   The tourist

Many texts in the four textbook series are written from the perspective of the tourist; this applies especially to *Catch.* As shown in Chapter 7, students are taken to many typical tourist destinations, and they are informed about things to do and see in the

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[114] The term 'collective cultural identity' refers to Brøgger 's (1992) argument which is presented in section 3.2.2.

different places. Quite a few exercises follow up these texts by asking the students to plan a trip to the city or country in question, and to decide which sights and events they would like to include in their itinerary.

In this way, the textbooks indicate that foreign travel is a possible arena for English language use. But, as mentioned in section 7.2, it is worth noticing that the exercise material in the textbooks does not emphasize 'tourist English' to any great extent. Some dialogues show students how they can order tickets and hotel rooms, ask for directions and order food at a restaurant, and occasional exercises ask the students to practice language that is suitable for typical tourist situations. But it seems obvious that, if students really were to be prepared for the role of the tourist, many more exercises and activities related to different tourist situations could have been included.

The section in the back of *New People, New Places* that presents aspects of Norwegian culture by way of color photographs (most of which show beautiful landscape scenes) also seems to indicate tourist situations. Although the section presents a rather glossy picture of the country and provides very little factual information, the material might be useful for students who want to talk about Norway in situations abroad or to visitors to their own country. While no exercise material is included in this section, it seems that future textbooks could include more exercises and activities that encourage students to practice relevant language and to prepare themselves for such situations.

10.3.4   The native speaker

Some exercises, especially in *Flight* and *New People, New Places*, seem to indicate that learners need to be prepared to conduct their everyday lives in English. The context established is one in which the speakers live in an English-speaking country, and learners are taught for example how to apply for a job on the basis of an advertisement, how to order a book by telephone and how to get a refrigerator repaired (*Flight 10 WB*: 116; *NPNP 3*: 22; *NPNP 3*: 154). Exercises that ask students to explain how a copying machine and a vacuum cleaner work and to express affection to a sweetheart also suggest a setting in an English-speaking country (*Flight 8 WB*: 128-129; *Flight 10 WB*: 12).

Some exercises point to the students' own environment and ask them to act out situations where they speak or write to their parents, interview their grandparents or neighbors and write a letter to their local newspaper – all in English (eg *NPNP 2*: 130; *NPNP 2*: 171; *Search 8*: 45; *Search 9*: 57). Exercises such as these can, of course, be criticized on the grounds that they point to the type of unlikely and artificial communication situations that were discussed in section 8.2.2. But they are also problematic in the way that they seem to obscure the many differences between Norwegian and English discourse conventions that may come into play in the situations that are referred to. Last, but not least, the value of the exercises can be questioned because they point to situations that are relevant only for the native speaker of English, thus suggesting that the native speaker's competence is the obvious goal for the learners.

It is, of course, natural to bring an element of role-play into a foreign language learning situation, in order for students to practice different communication situations. But there seems to be no reason to ask students to take on roles that may be both irrelevant and rather difficult for them. Among the rather far-fetched native-speaker roles that today's textbooks offer the students are those of a Beefeater who tries to hinder the theft of the Crown Jewels and a commander of a police force during a bomb scare (*NPNP 1*: 33; *NPNP 1*: 91). It can be argued that exercises like these ought to be avoided not only because they point to irrelevant and unrealistic situations of language use, but also because they seem to indicate that English is used primarily by native speakers of the language, in situations that are far removed from the students' everyday lives.

10.3.5   The self

Naturally, Norwegian students of English constitute their identity on the basis of a whole range of factors in addition to that of being students and learners of English. They come from different social and cultural backgrounds, they have different interests and concerns, and they probably identify to varying degrees with the texts and topics that the textbooks and the classroom situation offer them. Thus, to make sure that students are able to make the learning of English relevant in their own lives, it

seems crucial that they are allowed and encouraged to reflect on their own positions vis-à-vis the foreign language and to use it for their own purposes.

In present-day textbooks, students are encouraged to speak 'as themselves', first and foremost, when they are asked to talk to their classmates or write a text about issues related to their own background and experience. They are, for example, asked about their favorite musicians, films they have seen, sports activities that they are engaged in and their relationship with friends and family (eg *Catch 10*: 61; *NPNP 2*: 165; ibid: 171; *Flight 9 WB*: 92; *NPNP 2*: 196; *Search 9*: 15; ibid: 17; *Catch 10*: 138). In exercises like these, students get the opportunity to explore and experience how English can be used to communicate about their own lives. The exercises are also important in indicating to the students that their own experience and knowledge provide sufficient content for real use of the foreign language.

Still, it could be argued that many more such activities ought to be included and, not least, that a wider range of topics could be presented for discussion. Today's textbooks seem to address the typical, Western teenager and ask questions about relatively uncontroversial issues in the average youngster's everyday life. In this way, they can be criticized for presenting only a limited range of topics. They can also be criticized for not providing *all* students with equal opportunities when it comes to being able to identify themselves with the educational situation, to share their experiences and to voice their own concerns.

This situation also reduces the opportunities for learning and insight that can result from an investigation of the (cultural) diversity that can be seen in most classrooms. Hvistendahl (2004) suggests that there is a tendency in Norwegian classrooms to fail to acknowledge cultural diversity and value conflicts and to convey the impression that Norwegian society is more homogenous than it really is. This she attributes to the inclination in Norway, as an egalitarian society, to focus on that which binds Norwegians together, while a blind eye is turned to the things that keep Norwegians apart.

Students are also encouraged to speak 'as themselves' when they are challenged to take a stand on different issues and to present their own reactions to the texts that they read. As argued in section 10.2.2, any topic and any task can be related to the

students' own contexts, provided that the students are allowed to reflect on and talk about the issue in terms of their own understanding of it. *Search* is the series that, among today's textbooks, indicates most clearly how students can be encouraged to 'speak with their own voice' and also to develop and to justify their own points of view.

Today's textbooks also indicate many other ways in which foreign language education can link up with the students' own contexts and thus help them reflect on and develop their own positions as users of the foreign language. These strategies can, clearly, be exploited even more in future textbooks for the teaching of English.

First of all, there seems to be reason for textbooks to exemplify more situations in which students may be likely to need English language skills. Texts could, for example, show Norwegians who use English on trips abroad or in encounters with visitors to this country. Descriptions could be given of situations where Norwegians need English in their studies, in their work or in their leisure time. The latter opens innumerable opportunities, since most Norwegians have considerable contact with English in their everyday lives.

Secondly, there seems to be no reason to underestimate the potential that lies in the students' experience with English outside the classroom. Movies, TV programs, computer games, song lyrics and communication situations on the internet and in real life are probably only some of the many possible key words here. The experience that students have with English in their free time can, of course, provide input for the foreign language classroom in the form of concrete learning materials. Even more important, however, is the link that can be made with the students' own world outside the school situation, and the reflection on the relevance of English in the students' own lives that may result from it.

Last, but not least, future textbooks could make much more of an effort than today's textbooks do when it comes to encouraging students to establish and maintain contacts with people in other parts of the world. While the English syllabus in *L-97* refers repeatedly to the importance of such contacts, today's textbooks provide few reminders for the students to follow up these intentions. Contacts with people in other countries will, of course, involve both valuable language practice and cultural input.

But it should also be remembered that it is only in encounters with 'the other' that students really have an opportunity to consider their own role and their own 'self'. While there is an obvious possibility for intercultural learning here, situations of intercultural contact can also contribute to the students' awareness of who they are, who they want to be and how their own identities can be negotiated in situations of foreign language use.

10.4 Summary and discussion

In today's textbooks, the opportunities for students' choice lie, first and foremost, in the amount of material that is included. All textbooks present many texts and tasks and it is indicated quite clearly that teachers and students need to select the ones that they find most suitable.

Apart from some suggestions for project work that point to other sources of information, the choices are limited to the material that the textbooks provide. A main concern in the textbooks is to provide students with texts at different levels of difficulty and exercises that train different skills. Very few opportunities are given for students to choose their own topics and to find their own ways of working with them.

Most chapters present texts and exercises in a fixed pattern and this, clearly, helps teachers and students see the options that are available to them. Sometimes, students are encouraged in introductions to texts and commentaries to the exercises to reflect on the choices that they make. There are also some photo-copyable forms in the teacher's guides that aim to help students when planning and evaluating their work. Still, it seems that future textbooks could attach much more emphasis to encouraging and training students to assess their own progression and to make choices in accordance with their development as language learners.

Above all, it would seem natural if future textbooks for the teaching of English provided more opportunities for students to work with topics of their own choice and to define their own materials and approaches. While a textbook must, necessarily, make many decisions on behalf of the students, this does not mean that it cannot also encourage teachers and students to be active agents in the planning and the implementation of their own work. Future textbooks could, first of all, refer to and

exemplify approaches to work with the abundant sources for learning that can be found in the world outside the classroom. But it is probably also advisable for them to be less linear and seemingly 'prepackaged' than today's textbooks are. If this is done, future textbooks could move away from the 'strait-jacket' function that some present-day textbooks seem to have, and function more as a resource and a 'map' for classroom work with English.

When it comes to the ways in which students are encouraged to relate to and work with the textbook material, both text types and exercise types have a role to play. Today's textbooks include many ostensive and narrative texts, while discursive texts are almost non-existent. Most of the narrative texts that are included are fictional texts

Since narratives are, on the whole, more easily accessible than most information-focused (ostensive) texts are, a possibility for future textbooks could be to include more narrative texts, also non-fictional ones. A natural approach here could be to let people from other cultures tell about different aspects of their everyday life and experience. At the same time, it is obvious that students need to be provided with factual information both about conditions in other countries and about issues related to foreign language use and intercultural communication. When presenting such information, however, it might be a good idea to make use of discursive texts that invite students to reflect on and to construct their own understanding of the issue at hand.

While present-day textbooks offer students an abundance of closed questions and exercises, a key point for future textbooks would be to provide them with open ones. This does not mean that textbooks should disregard the persistent practice and repetition that is needed in order to learn a foreign language. Among the textbook series, *Search*, in particular, shows how even practice activities can be formulated in a way that opens for the students' own creative and independent use of the language. In this textbook series, one can see how open exercises are useful not only in the way that they encourage students to express their own understandings, opinions and concerns when using the foreign language, they also make it possible for students to complete a task in a way that corresponds to their own level of proficiency.

In order to signal that the teaching of English aims to enable students to use the language for their own purposes, in situations of international communication, it may be wise for authors of future textbooks to reflect on the roles that they, explicitly and implicitly, make available for the learners. Today's textbooks send quite ambiguous messages here. Some texts place the learners in the role of the tourist, while few exercises follow up this perspective. Some texts and exercises indicate that students can adopt the role of the native speaker, and other, highly unlikely positions are also suggested.[115] The role that students are offered most often, however, is that of the language learner. It is also worth noticing that the development of the students' English language skills is justified, first and foremost, with reference to the context of the educational system.

Although Norwegian students of English will always, to some degree, have to identify themselves as language learners, there seem to be good reasons for textbooks to point to and prepare students for the many other roles that are available for them as well. The most obvious roles are the ones that the students define for themselves as speakers of the foreign language. As argued above, there seems to be great potential for development in future textbooks when it comes to linking up the teaching of English with the students' own contexts, for example by making use of materials and experiences from the students' own environment outside the school setting.

In an educational situation it is natural, of course, to prepare students for the role of the knowledgeable and opinionated citizen. In fact, foreign language education does not make much sense unless students have something to talk about and something they want to say. When it comes to defining the body of knowledge that students should develop, however, future curricula and textbooks can be said to have an important job to do.

The tendency that can be seen in today's textbooks of presenting a rather arbitrary selection of topics does not seem very fruitful. An obvious alternative would be to provide students with a content that can help them communicate with people from other cultures. Information about and experiences of cultural differences and

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[115] Some examples are provided in sections 7.2.9 and 8.2.2.

some of the issues that often come into play in situations of intercultural communication are natural key words here.

The most important concern in foreign language education, however, must be to motivate students to enter communication situations at all. In order for this to happen, students must be helped to see that the foreign language is a tool for them to use in order to express themselves and to learn about others. It seems that this can only be done if students are encouraged to develop and to voice their own understandings and opinions and if they are motivated to broaden their insight and experience by listening to what other people have to say. It is worth noticing that, among present-day textbooks, only *Search* seems to attach primary importance to this aspect of foreign language education.

11 Conclusion

11.1 Perspectives and procedures

The present study has as its starting point the view, suggested in the *L-97* English syllabus, that language, context and culture are interrelated. For foreign language education, this view has two main implications. First of all, in order for learners to be able to cope with the full meaning potential of the foreign language, there is an obvious need to teach language in context, and to work with various aspects of context and culture along with the different elements of language. Secondly, since foreign languages provide not only new words for already known concepts, but also new ways of thinking, talking about and understanding the world, foreign language education can have an important role to play when it comes to exposing students to expressions of 'otherness'. In presenting language, contexts and cultures that are different from the students' own, foreign language education can thus help learners to develop new cultural awareness and understanding. While such insights are valuable in themselves they are, of course, also crucial elements in the students' ability to communicate successfully in the foreign language.

The study has aimed to cast light on the ways in which the new developments in foreign language education can be followed up and implemented in the actual teaching situation, specifically in the teaching and learning of English at lower secondary level in Norway. Since textbooks are, traditionally, very central factors in determining what goes on in Norwegian classrooms, the study has focused on the approaches and practices related to questions of context and culture that can be seen in today's textbook series. With reference to this investigation – as well as to perspectives from recent research on this aspect of foreign language education - I have pointed out and discussed potential for further development in textbooks in the future.

11.2 Results and implications

The following sections sum up the results of the present study and discuss the implications that they may have for future textbooks for the teaching of English in Norway. First, I address the need to base work with questions of context and culture in

a foreign language course on a clear understanding of the objectives for doing so (section 11.2.1). For the sake of clarity, the challenges and opportunities related to the different objectives are discussed separately in sections 11.2.2 – 11.2.4. Still, it must be remembered that the objectives are, of course, related and can be worked with simultaneously.

11.2.1 Objectives for work with questions of context and culture

Different objectives can be linked to foreign language students' work with questions of context and culture, and the present study has shown that the *L-97* English syllabus and present-day textbooks reflect quite a few of them. The need for students to develop the ability to use English appropriately in a variety of different situational contexts is mentioned both in the syllabus and in some of the introductory texts in the teacher's guides. Cultural insight is seen to be an important element here, and the syllabus underlines that foreign language use requires not only language skills, but also 'the ability to communicate across cultural divides' (C-*99*: 239). This can be interpreted as a reference to the need for learners of a foreign language to concern themselves with intercultural issues.

The teaching of English in Norway also aims to provide students with information about and experiences with texts and topics related to English-speaking countries. In addition, the cultural material is, clearly, intended to appeal to the students' interests and thus function as motivating 'carrier content' for their work with the language. Many of the topics signal that they have been chosen in order to link up with the students' previous knowledge about the English-speaking world. These intentions can be seen in the English syllabus' requirements and suggestions for each grade level and, not least, in the texts and topics that have been included in the textbooks.

It must be concluded, however, that the different objectives could have been stated much more clearly and also that they could have been followed up in a much more consistent way. In the syllabus, there seems to be a lack of correspondence between the initial formulations on the one hand and the grade level requirements on the other. While the former link cultural insight to the development of the students' practical language skills and also to the development of the students' respect and

understanding for other cultures, the texts and topics that are suggested in the latter part of the document seem to fall into the 'background studies' tradition of providing students with factual information about selected aspects of the foreign culture. The requirements also reflect the tradition of educating the students about the foreign countries' 'high culture', with special emphasis on British and American literary canon.

While the texts and topics suggested in the grade level requirements could, of course, be exploited in terms of work with language in context as well as with intercultural issues, it is worth noticing that no mention is made of the need to do so. In this way, the impression is given that the syllabus' initial concerns related to the development of the students' awareness of different situational and cultural contexts are not followed up in the rest of the document. Thus, a message seems to be communicated that these concerns are not very important.

There also seems to be a lack of correspondence in the syllabus when it comes to the contexts and cultures that Norwegian students are to be prepared for. While the importance of English is linked, first and foremost, to its position as a language for international communication, practically all the specific texts and authors that are suggested have to do with the United Kingdom and the United States. This can also be seen as an indication that the cultural material aims to make students familiar with aspects of these countries' cultural heritage rather than to make them aware of the many aspects of context and culture that can come into play in a communication situation.

In the textbooks, few explicit references are made to objectives for the students' work with questions of context and culture. The teacher's guides and the prefaces to the textbooks convey the impression that information about the English-speaking world is considered to be an obvious ingredient in the course. However, no justification for such a view and no principles for the selection of topics are presented. Only one of the teacher's guides in the *Search* series mentions the need for cultural issues to be selected and worked with in such a way that they support the development of the students' ability to communicate in the foreign language.

The materials offered in the textbooks indicate that primary importance is attached to providing students with varied glimpses of the English-speaking world. The motivation effect of the topics seems to have been a central concern in the selection process. But many texts and topics have also been included in order to provide students with factual information about English-speaking countries, and to make them familiar with some examples of the foreign countries' literature.

The texts provide many examples of language use in different contexts. Yet, few efforts are made to draw the students' attention to questions of appropriate language use and to the ways in which language needs to be adapted to different situations and discourse conventions. The selection of texts, topics and exercises also indicates that the development of the students' intercultural awareness and of their attitudes towards other cultures is no main concern in today's textbooks.

Some inconsistencies in the ways that the cultural material is presented and followed up in the textbook series seem to contribute to some confusion as to what the objectives linked to the different texts and topics are. Many texts, for example, provide encounters with some of the world's greatest authors and literary masterpieces, while the questions and exercises that are attached to the texts focus neither on the information that is provided about the author and his or her work nor on the text's literary qualities. There are also many texts that provide substantial factual information about the different countries, but the exercise material signals that no great importance is attached to whether students learn and remember any of this information or not.

The seeming haphazard selection of texts and topics can also be said to contribute to the impression that no clear idea exists of the purpose that the cultural material is expected to serve. Texts that provide students with substantial information about central aspects of a foreign culture are juxtaposed with texts that seem to have been selected only because of their entertainment value. In this way, the large number of texts that deal with peripheral topics and incidental events can be said to undermine the perceived importance of the cultural material that is included.

Search is the only textbook series that seems to have had the development of the students' socio-cultural competence in mind when selecting cultural topics. This textbook series presents most foreign countries in quite a systematic way, and it also

provides the students with some insights that will be useful if and when they communicate with someone from the country in question. However, a central element in socio-cultural competence is knowledge about everyday life and some of the 'do's and the don'ts' of the foreign culture. Such information is not emphasized in any of the textbook series.

It can be concluded, then, that there is potential for improvement in future textbooks and curricular documents when it comes to clarifying the objectives linked to questions of context and culture in the teaching and learning of English. Explicit statements about these objectives and the rationale for including different texts, topics and approaches in the course can be seen as the most central factors here. At the same time, it can be argued that the teaching and learning materials also need to be presented in a way that communicates clearly what the objectives are.

11.2.2   Work with cultural material

The teaching of English has a long tradition of providing students with factual information about foreign cultures, and there may be many good reasons why this should continue to be the case in the future. However, the materials investigated in the present study indicate several challenges when it comes to the selection of texts and topics.

Evidently, the most basic issue that needs to be addressed has to do with the cultural materials' function in the foreign language course. As we have seen, cultural information can be presented in order to contribute to the students' knowledge about the world, it can be used to support the development of the students' communication skills, and it can be geared towards the development of the students' attitudes towards other countries and people. Last, but not least, cultural material can also be selected in order to function as interesting and motivating 'carrier content' for the students' work with the language.

If the objective of the cultural material is to contribute to the students' knowledge about the world, today's textbooks' seemingly arbitrary selection of topics can hardly be recommended. An alternative here could be to link the teaching of English closely to the topics that are covered in other subjects, such as history or social studies, and draw on influences from the field of bilingual education (see eg Hellekjær

1994). The topics that the *L*-97 English syllabus suggests for the tenth grade could be said to reflect such a strategy.

It is, however, important to remember that the development of foreign language skills requires insight into cultural topics that are not usually dealt with in other subjects. Common cultural references and understandings in various communities, different norms of behavior and different discourse conventions are only some of the key words here. Brøgger's (1992) call for topics that are central in the foreign population's collective cultural identity indicates one possible approach to the selection of relevant topics in a foreign language course.

In the teaching of English, the decision of which countries and cultures to focus on is a central one. We have seen that present-day materials seem to vacillate between a traditional emphasis on British and American culture and an approach that includes material related to other countries in the English-speaking world as well. The textbooks also reflect the belief that attractive glimpses of the English-speaking world will motivate students for work with the language.

There are several reasons to reconsider the traditional focus on the United Kingdom and the United States in the teaching of English as a foreign language. One reason has to do with the 'Robinson Crusoe' effect of this tradition, while another reason can be found in the fact that the importance of English in Norwegian classrooms rests, first and foremost, on its role as a language for international communication. From this perspective, information about a wide variety of countries and cultures in the world could be seen as equally relevant. Thus, it can be argued that future English textbooks ought to discard the 'obvious' focus on the United Kingdom and the United States and instead select topics and cultural communities in accordance with clear and explicit arguments for doing so.

In the investigated textbooks, quite a few texts aim to combine the informative with the entertaining. However, the result can often be said to meet neither objective. Examples of such texts are those that try to make the presentation of British and American history palatable by concentrating on the historical development of issues that the students are familiar with (such as fashion and foods) and on isolated, conspicuous events. Clearly, if the aim is to entertain and amuse the students, texts

with a lower information density and higher motivation value could be chosen. If, on the other hand, the aim is to inform the students, more central topics ought to be covered.

Many texts obviously try to link up with the students' own experience and to appeal to their interests and concerns by dealing with typical teenage issues such as friendship, love, and leisure activities. The model reader here seems to be the Western teenager who is primarily interested in the private sphere of life. It could be argued, however, that a broader perspective ought to be taken, both in order to cater for the diversity of the student body and in order to expose the learners to new ways of experiencing and understanding the world. It could also be argued that more challenging and controversial issues could help trigger many students' involvement which, in turn, might have positive effects on the students' learning and their motivation to use the language at all.[116]

The attempt to find a content that students will find interesting and motivating will, of course, always be a difficult one. The most obvious response to this challenge may be to provide many opportunities for students to choose their own texts, topics and approaches. The English syllabus' call for cultural topics to spring from the contacts that students have with people in the outside world also indicates a possible approach.

11.2.3   Work with situational contexts

In the *L-97* English syllabus and present-day textbooks, little emphasis is attached to the development of the students' ability to use English appropriately in different contexts and to making them aware of discourse conventions that differ from their own. While it is understandable that intermediate students of English are not informed about all the challenges involved in trying to adapt one's language to a given situation, it does not seem like a good idea to disregard the issue altogether and thus convey the impression that it is of no importance in foreign language learning.

It seems that the least a foreign language textbook can do is to draw the teachers' attention to questions of appropriate language use. The teacher's guide could

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[116] Korsvold (2004) indicates that this might be the case in her discussion of the questions that students are given for the final, written exam.

provide information about some of the issues that can be addressed and also describe some techniques and approaches that focus on language in context. The teacher could be given a central role in prompting such work, but the material in the students' textbooks could also illustrate and draw the students' attention to the ways in which language changes according to context.

In present-day textbooks, the texts for reading and listening provide an abundance of input that shows the very different ways in which people actually use language. But hardly any commentaries or exercises focus on the relationships between language and context that the texts illustrate. In future textbooks, then, there seems to be good reason to include exercises that encourage students to explore these relationships. Texts could also, of course, be included that inform students about different discourse conventions and describe some of the possible effects of not being aware of them.

Since most Norwegian students of English have considerable contact with the language outside the classroom, they will probably find discussions of language variation both relevant and motivating. Moreover, there is reason to believe that they can contribute much to this discussion by drawing on their own experiences with English in various activities outside school. Future textbooks can, clearly, exploit these activities much more than today's textbooks do. They can also base more of the students' work with the language on the contacts that students could be expected to establish with people in the world outside the classroom.

When working with 'real' language use in 'real' contexts one will, necessarily, come across examples of non-standard English. This happens in today's textbooks, too, where the fictional texts, in particular, provide many instances of colloquial language. The commentaries to the texts and the exercise material, however, disregard these examples. The many differences between 'correct' English and the language that people actually use are simply not addressed.

While there may be some good reasons to teach students a formal variety of English, present-day textbooks miss a golden opportunity to develop the students' language awareness here. Since Norwegian students have ample access to non-standard varieties of English outside the classroom, it does not seem wise to ignore

these varieties as if they did not exist. There is reason to believe that students would find it both motivating and relevant if different varieties and norms of language were discussed and worked with in the language learning situation. Non-native varieties, which are virtually non-existent in the investigated textbooks, but very central in the students' own experience, seem to be obvious and necessary ingredients here.

11.2.4   Work with intercultural issues

We have seen how the 1997 National Curriculum calls for the development of international understanding and solidarity across borders. The English syllabus in the same document, however, seems to indicate that the teaching of English can only 'lay a foundation' for the students' increased cultural insight and awareness. It can be argued that this view is followed up in today's textbooks, where little is done to actually influence the students' attitudes towards other countries and people or to help them see their own culture in a new light.

It must, however, be mentioned that the textbooks include many texts and topics that could be exploited for intercultural learning. Among these are texts that present 'real people' and texts that describe encounters between people from different cultural backgrounds. Most of these are fictional texts. There are also some non-fictional texts that inform students about cultural differences around the world.

In order to put more emphasis on intercultural issues in future textbooks it would, first of all, be natural to address such questions in the exercise materials. Students could be asked to discuss and reflect on the descriptions of foreign cultures that the texts and illustrations provide. They could also be encouraged to investigate aspects of their own culture. Furthermore, questions and exercises could help students address intercultural issues that are particularly relevant in their own situation, and they could be formulated in a way that challenges the students' own assumptions and understandings.

Secondly, more texts could be included that provide a good starting point for the development of the students' attitudes towards other cultures and reflection on cultural differences. Compared to present-day textbooks, more texts could be devoted to providing students with pictures of 'real' people, and more texts could present the foreign culture in ways that will trigger the students' emotional involvement. Texts

that describe cultural encounters and texts that address possible difficulties in situations of intercultural communication also seem highly relevant. While there is no need to overemphasize the challenges that situations of intercultural communication may involve, students' will hardly benefit from getting the impression that such challenges do not exist.

A main concern when trying to increase students' intercultural awareness would be to avoid presenting generally Western contexts and perspectives as if they were universally valid. The investigated textbooks indicate that there is considerable room for improvement here. In order to encourage the students' cultural as well as intercultural learning, one needs to focus explicitly on selected aspects of specific cultural contexts. However, it seems equally important to emphasize the diversity of cultures, both foreign cultures and the students' own. Multiple perspectives could be dealt with, and students could be encouraged to see the issues presented from different points of view.

11.2.5   The students' positions

When planning students' work with questions of context and culture as part of foreign language education, the roles and positions that students are offered may also be worth taking into consideration. In fact, in order to encourage students' efforts and personal involvement it seems that a main concern must be to allow students to reflect on and to define their own roles both as learners and as users of the foreign language. This can be seen as a necessary step in order to foster the enthusiasm, openness and curiosity that will enable the students to keep using the language in a never-ending search for new knowledge, awareness and insight.

While present-day textbooks define most of the texts, topics and approaches for the students, future textbooks should probably provide more opportunities for choice. This seems to be a necessary prerequisite for students to be able to reflect on their own needs for the language and their own preferred learning strategies. Also, if students were free to choose some of their own materials, this could open for better opportunities to link the teaching of English to the students' own experience and to the many and familiar arenas of English language use outside the classroom.

At the same time it is, of course, natural for a foreign language textbook to point to and to model situations in which the learners may need foreign language skills in the future and indicate some of the opportunities that mastery of a foreign language can provide. For Norwegian learners, a focus on some of the many possible arenas in which they are likely to need English skills will probably be experienced as both motivating and relevant. There seems to be no need, as today's textbooks do, to justify the students' work with English only with reference to the school context.

When it comes to the students' work with cultural and intercultural issues, future textbooks could, clearly, encourage students to work more actively and to get more personally involved with the material than the textbooks investigated in the present study do. The choice of topics and text types are, of course, central factors here, but the exercise material also plays an important role. While 'closed' activities may be useful in order to practice certain elements of language, open questions and exercises seem more conducive to the development of the students' understanding of and attitudes towards cultural and intercultural issues.

11.3 Final remarks

While the present study is limited to the teaching of English in Norwegian lower secondary school as it is seen in the *L-97* English syllabus and today's textbooks, it is my hope that it can have relevance for research, discussions and developments related to the teaching of English at other levels and for the teaching of other foreign languages as well. I also hope that, in describing part of the 'discourse' related to questions of context and culture and in unveiling some of the assumptions upon which it seems to be based, the study will inspire critical inquiry into future curricular documents and new generations of textbooks.

Some of the perspectives, approaches and results that the study presents can, perhaps, provide insights and points of reference for research that focuses on other elements in the teaching and learning situation as well. Obvious areas of interest here are classroom practices and the ways in which curricular requirements and textbook materials are interpreted and used in the classroom. Textbook authors', teachers' and

students' understanding of the role that questions of context and culture can play in foreign language education indicate another important research area.

The Council of Europe publications, which are highly influential in Norway, indicate that increased attention needs to be paid to questions of context and culture in foreign language education. The most recent issues of the main periodical for foreign language teachers in Norway (*Språk & Språkundervisning*) illustrate a growing interest for cultural and intercultural questions.[117] It is my hope that the present study will contribute to this development, where questions of context and culture are given a more central position in discussions and developments and in research related to foreign language education.

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[117] See eg *Språk & Språkundervisning 2/2003* and *Språk & Språkundervisning 1/2006.*

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Appendix

Tables 6.1A – 7.11A: Numerical data

Table 6.1 A: The ratio of prose text lines in the four textbook series with and without culture-specific reference, number of lines

CULTURE REFERENCE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	TOTAL
With culture-specific reference	8519	6815	9002	6720	31056
Without culture-specific reference	3516	935	1439	1298	7188
Total	12035	7750	10441	8018	38244

Table 7.1 A: The ratio of fictional and non-fictional prose texts, number of lines

TEXT TYPE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	TOTAL
Fictional texts	5542	3591	4746	4469	18348
Non-fictional texts	6493	4159	5695	3549	19896
Total	12035	7750	10441	8018	38244

Table 7.2 A: The number of fictional and non-fictional prose text lines with and without culture-specific reference. The total number of lines in all textbook series

CULTURE REFERENCE	FICTIONAL TEXTS	NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS
With culture-specific reference	15178	15878
Without culture-specific ref.	3170	4018
Total	18348	19896

Table 7.3 A: The ratio of fictional and non-fictional prose text lines devoted to different countries, all textbook series

CULTURE REFERENCE	FICTIONAL TEXTS	NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS
United Kingdom	5797	5667
United States	5652	5078
Other countries	3729	5133
Without culture-specific ref.	3170	4018
Total	18348	19896

Table 7.4 A: The number of prose text lines devoted to different countries, specified for each textbook series

CULTURE REFERENCE	*FLIGHT*	*NPNP*	*SEARCH*	*CATCH*	TOTAL
United Kingdom	3196	2416	3530	2322	11464
United States	3472	2368	2588	2302	10730
Other English-speaking countries	1474	1855	1845	1329	6503
Non English-speaking countries	377	176	1039	767	2359
Without culture-specific reference	3516	935	1439	1298	7188
Total	12035	7750	10441	8018	38244

Table 7.5 A: The prose texts' presentation of countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States, number of lines

COUNTRIES	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
Australia	494	354	227	682	1757
India	67	379	306		752
Ireland	323	269	566	265	1423
Other English-speaking countries	590	853	746	382	2571
Norway	162	51	230	56	499
Other non-English speaking countries	215	125	809	711	1860

Table 7.6 A: The prose texts that refer to the United Kingdom.
The distribution of fictional and non-fictional texts, number of lines

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
Non-fictional texts	1451	1299	1748	1169	5667
Fictional texts	1745	1117	1782	1153	5797
Total	3196	2416	3530	2322	11464

Table 7.7 A: The non-fictional prose texts that refer to the United Kingdom.
The distribution of lines devoted to different content areas, number of lines

CONTENT AREA	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
History, cultural heritage	756	679	761	606	2802
Contemporary issues and general info.	382	470	522	304	1678
Presentation of individual people	313	150	465	259	1187
Total	1451	1299	1748	1169	5667

Table 7.8 A: The prose texts that refer to the United States.
The distribution of fictional and non-fictional texts, number of lines

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
Non-fictional texts	1526	1178	1432	942	5078
Fictional texts	1946	1190	1156	1360	5652
Total	3472	2368	2588	2302	10730

Table 7.9 A: The non-fictional prose texts that refer to the United States.
The distribution of lines devoted to different content areas, number of lines

CONTENT AREA	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
History, cultural heritage	1088	630	944	425	3087
Contemporary issues and general info.	252	209	367	196	1024
Presentation of individual people	186	339	121	321	967
Total	1526	1178	1432	942	5078

Table 7.10 A: The distribution of different types of British fictional texts, number of lines

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
Canon, historical texts	522	114	567	370	1573
Children's / teenage literature	490	780	720	561	2551
Crime, mystery, entertainment	610	172	330	190	1302
Fairy tales, legends, myths	123	51	165	32	371
Total	1745	1117	1782	1153	5797

Table 7.11 A: The distribution of different types of American fictional texts, number of lines

TEXT TYPE	FLIGHT	NPNP	SEARCH	CATCH	TOTAL
Canon, historical texts	592	515	272	744	2123
Children's / teenage literature	1094	583	749	529	2955
Crime, mystery, entertainment	147	0	26	33	206
Fairy tales, legends, myths	113	92	109	54	368
Total	1946	1190	1156	1360	5652