



Culture Disintegration and Syllabus Mutilation to affect Iranian EFL Learners' Attitude and Listening Comprehension Skill

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to investigate the potential effects of culture disintegration and text mutilation on Iranian EFL learners both in terms of their attitudes towards the censorship of the material and their listening comprehension. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was applied with 64 adult- EFL learners in two groups randomly assigned as experimental and control groups. The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) was given as the pretest to homogenize the students and after a two-month treatment a parallel test was repeated to explore the effects. In order to find learners' attitudes towards culture disintegration and text mutilation a validated questionnaire was used. Data analysis findings indicate that learners have a strongly negative attitude towards text mutilation and that EFL learners who participated in the culture-integrated class outperformed those who were taught the mutilated material. The researcher concludes that culture disintegration and syllabus mutilation in English teaching contexts can negatively affect different participants to varying degrees

Key Words: Culture disintegration/Culture integration/ Attitude listening skill.

Key words: Culture, Culture Disintegration, Culture Integration, Syllabus Mutilation

Introduction

Globalization as a modern phenomenon has turned the world we live in to a small village. This is mainly the outcome of rapid growth in information and communication technology. There is an ongoing exposure to the flow of information from various sources available to anyone. The world is now coming through satellite, TV, online print media and, the internet. This has brought with it the possibility for the individuals to share their views, ideas, and cultural points face to face.

According to Cook, (1999) and Guiheme, (2002), "

English language teachers have radically changed their attitudes since 1978 and the direction of the change suggests a further evolution. In the 1980s, content in their courses aroused their annoyance and disappointment. They not only saw little need for this added burden, they were also afraid of it. During the last 27 years, the anger and fear gave way to more pessimistic readings in ELT contexts". Additionally, Cook, (1999) purposes that the horrible mutilation of the passages, tapes, films, learning and teaching materials as well as English magazines and newspapers is the least preventive

measure done in ELT contexts to reduce the probability of culture invasion (Cook, 1999; Guiheme, 2002).

Cook, (1999) and Kramersch, (1998) assert that the purpose of teaching culture is not akin to the transmission of information related to the people of the target community or country even though, knowledge about the "target group" is an important ingredient, without teaching culture, the English language teaching is a deficient piece of work. The importance of culture in language teaching It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture and it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists consider that without language, culture manifestation would not be possible. Language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it. In the broadest sense, it is also the symbolic representation of a people, since it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds, as, well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. (Brown, 1999, p. 165) describes the two as follows: A language is a part of a culture and culture is a part of a language: the two are intricately interwoven so that one can not separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. In a word, culture and language are inseparable. Some people say that language is the mirror of culture, in the sense that people can see a culture through its language. Another metaphor used to symbolize language and culture is ice berg. The visible part is language, with a small part it culture, the greater part, lying hidden beneath the surface, is the invisible aspect of culture make a living organism; language is flesh culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead. Without language, culture would have no shape. Many linguists explore the relationship between language and culture. (Nida/1998, p. 29) holds the view that 'language and culture are two symbolic systems.

Everything we say in language and culture has meaning; designative or associative, denotative or connotative. Every language form we use has a meaning, carries meanings that are not in the same sense of the language because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language,

Teaching culture without pre conceptions

Cultural information should be presented in a nonjudgmental fashion, in a way that does not place value or judgment on distinction between the students' native culture and the culture explored in the classroom. Kramersch (1993) describes the "Third culture" -of the language classroom- a neutral space

that learners can create and use to explore and reflect on their own culture and the target culture and language. Some teachers have found it effective to present students with objects or ideas that are specific to the culture of study but unfamiliar to the students. The students are given clues or background information about the objects and ideas so that they can incorporate the new information into their own world view. This could lead in to the related discussion in the target culture. It is also important to help students understand that cultures are not monolithic.

A variety of successful behaviors are possible for any type of interaction in any particular culture. Teachers must allow students to observe and explore cultural interaction from their own perspectives to enable them to find their own voice in the second speech community.

Young adult attitude towards foreign culture

Professor of English language (Michael Lessard – Clouston, 2004), recognizes three aspects of culture. These are 'general', 'specific' and 'dynamic' aspects. The first one, according to (Saville Troike, 1975, p. 83) "Incorporates both 'material' manifestation of culture that are easily seen and 'non-material' ones that are more difficult to observe". The culture features are sometimes easily recognized and they sometimes hide behind some behaviors. There fore, it is difficult to learn or teach them. (Adaskov & Fahsi, 1990, pp. 3-4) by the culture has a specific aspect which includes specific aspect of culture mean;

Cinema, Literature, music, and media. Family, interpersonal, relations, custom, material condition... the system which conditions for capt ions and thoughts... the background knowledge, social and Paralinguistic skill, and language code which are necessary for successful communication.

Moreover, Lessard – Clouston (2004) agrees with Robinson (1988:11) that culture has "a dynamic system of symbols and meaning [where] past experience influences meaning, which in turn affects experience, which in turn effects subsequent meaning, and so on". That is why contexts in which specific elements of a given culture are presented by teachers should be carefully chosen. It is not desirable to acquaint our students with culture tips at random.

Another reason for careful selection of culture

topics is the type of motivation that learners have. They have their own will and they have different interests and perspective for their future. Most of them is aware of their needs while learning a foreign language. Rod Ellis (1997: 75-76) describes instrumental, integrative, regulative, and intrinsic motivation. Shortly, the first is an instrument to get a better job. Students are not interested in more than is necessary to be fluent in the language. Integrative motivation is visible in students' are interested in the people and culture represented by the target – language group". For these learners, culture lesson, inspire them to get better command of language and satisfy their needs. Next, resultative motivation is "the cause of L2 achievement.

Thus, the popularity of British and American culture may enhance Polish students to learn the language. Finally, intrinsic motivation means "the degree of effort a learner makes to learn an L2 as a result of the interest generated by particular learning activity: (Ellis 1997: 140). This kind of motivation may be encouraged by culture-related topics which seem to be motivating themselves. This is the case even more important in the situation where learners are distant from the target – language country. Additionally, we can find some proof for the idea of culture teaching in Larsen- Freeman's (1987: 2-10) second angle of her triangle. She mentions the importance of 'language learning/ learners', 'language/culture' and 'language teaching/teacher/'. According to her, 'developing in one's students an understanding of the attitudes, values, beliefs of a particular target culture is at least as important as imparting factual knowledge" (1987:5). As a final point, I want to mention Marcin Smolik and Joanna Galant's (2002:4) factual opinion on the subject of introducing British and American elements of culture. They admit that culture awareness is essential in stimulating the intellectual and emotional development of the learners. They are also aware of the fact that Poland enters European Union and Poles should be educated in the sense of their own high self-esteem and identity as well as Polish students be taught respect for other groups of people and their cultures.

Participants

Participants of the present study were selected based on convenient sampling procedure from among 98 candidates at "some English Institutes" in Tehran who had passed CELT with one standard deviation below or above the mean score and were volunteers to take part in the research. 64 students

finally participated in the study. Participants were both male and female and aged between twenty to thirty at intermediate level

Design

The investigator applied a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in this study. A pre-test and a post-test were used to explore the possible effects material censorship might have on the participants. A questionnaire was distributed at the end to find out about students attitudes. As the independent variable in this study is personality type, 33, randomly selected students out of 64, were placed in two other classes taught by independent teachers as the experimental groups of the study and were also supposed to pass a 2-month treatment period. The remaining 31 were randomly chosen as the control group of the study. Additionally, the researcher made an attempt to identify the very nature and significance of relationship between two variables rather than establishing a simple cause-and-effect relationship. Hence, as recommended by Hatch and Farhady (1981) the variables could be categorized as "quasi-experimental" research. It is worth mentioning that the issue of text-mutilation, the culture integration and culture disintegration and the way of teaching are three variables of this study.

Instrumentation

The first instrument which was used by the Institute to measure the language proficiency level of the students, was an original test of English as the foreign language (CELT), a well-known and widely used English language proficiency test. The instruments used to conduct the present study are introduced in the following sections. CELT

The first instrument used by one of the Institutes to measure the language proficiency level of the students was the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT). The test has earned an excellent reputation as a valid and reliable instrument for measuring English language proficiency for English as a second language (ESL). It is especially appropriate for high school, college and adult ESL programs at the intermediate and advanced levels.

Listening, Structure and Vocabulary tests measure important dimensions of second language learning. Each section is of sufficient length to yield reliable results. Authors are experienced test writers in the field of ESL. All items are pretested on large samples of students of diverse language backgrounds

enrolled in intensive, college-level and high school ESL programs.

The test is to be taken in 115 minutes, and encompasses three major sections:

- 1) The structure section consists of 75 items. This type of items involves an incomplete sentences and requires the test taker choose from the four options given for each sentence the one which completes it. The time for completing this section is 35 minutes.
- 2) The vocabulary section consists of 75 items. This

type of items involves an incomplete sentence and requires the test taker choose from the four options given for each sentence the one which completes it. The time for this section is 35 minutes.

3) The listening comprehension section consists of 24 items. The test taker is supposed to answer to the questions related to 3 different texts, each text has 8 questions the time allocated to this section is 35 minutes.

The allotment of scores is demonstrated below:

CELT	NUMBER OF ITEMS
Structure	75
Vocabulary	75
Listening comprehension	24

Table 3. 1: CELT item distribution

Questionnaire

A close – ended questionnaire was administrated it comprised of 32 items and was made up of 5 options. The first corresponded to strongly agree and the fifth to strongly disagree. Because of the uniqueness of this case study the researcher had to design the questions herself based on the intention of the study. Tow teachers as the rater and a professor in the field of education reviewed and approved of questions.

To ascertain that the participants beliefs and attitudes towards their native culture and the censorship of English books and text mutilations and the effect on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners were clearly depicted.

Procedures

CELT as specified in Table 3.1. included 174 items in three sections: Structure, Vocabulary and Listening Comprehension. Each individual subtest started with detailed instructions in English. However, the participants' native language was also used to give explanations and to make sure that they fully understood how to perform on each part. The students were given 115 minutes to finish the three subtests and were required to mark their answers on the answer sheets. Based on the scores of the CELT, sixty-four participants were selected to take CELT as the pre-test.

Participants were then randomly divided into control and experimental groups. A two-month treatment was conducted during the course by including cultural content to a reasonable degree in the process of teaching. On the other hand, text mutilation and cultural disintegration were applied to teaching in experimental group's class. The book used for instruction is called "Extra book" by "Miles Craven"(Cambridge university press, 2004). This book provides original and stimulating listening practice across a range of levels and topics. Activities are designed around authentic scenarios and help develop specific listening skills, such as listening for details, identifying emotions or listening for opinions. The recordings expose students to a variety of native and non-native accents and cover a range of genres from radio and television to academic lectures, presentations and conversational dialogues. Ten units of this book were taught to both experimental and control groups while one group had the extremely mutilated book and the other was introduced to reasonable culture integration within the same material.

After the treatment course, CELT was given to both control and experimental groups for a second time to measure the effects of the treatment and the scores were recorded accordingly.

Descriptive Statistics of the proficiency test (CELT)

As mentioned before CELT at table 3.1 was given as the proficiency test to 64 candidates to measure their English proficiency level prior to and after the treatment. The Std. Deviation of CELT for the pretest was 12.43263 while on the posttest it was increased to 14.11855. The same was the case for the mean which was 32.0833 on the pretest and 44.6667 on the posttest. The sum of scores on pretest was 962.50 while on the posttest it was increased up to 1340.00. The maximum score was 59 for pretest and 83 for

posttest; the minimum score was also increased from 14.00 to 23.00. The overall behavior of measures onpretest and posttest indicated that candidates' performance on the posttest was better than that of pretest.

The collected data was analyzed using the program statistical package for social science (SPSS). The analyses included descriptive statistics including means, minimum values, standard deviations, and percentages. For comparative analysis independent sample *t*-test and one-way analysis of Cron Bach alpha were used.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
pretest	Equal variances assumed	.013	.911	1.136	57	.261	3.5489	3.12375	-2.70634	9.80405
	Equal variances not assumed			1.138	56.903	.260	3.5489	3.11967	-2.69842	9.79612

Figure 4.1: Distribution of scores on pre/post control Group control

The observed t value is 1.136 and the significance level is .261. Since .261 is bigger in value than 0.05, therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the control and experimental groups at the beginning of the present study. This further shows that the groups are homogenous.

H0: data are normal
 H1: data are not normal
 The level of sig. being less than .05: sig < .05
 H0 is not rejected here, because > .05
 and > .05 so data are normal in pre/post test of the control group *t*-test
 .(Group statistics for the post-tests)

The level of significance assigned is .05 (alpha)

The level of significance should be compared with

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
posttest	Equal variances assumed	1.567	.216	-3.546	57	.001	-14.1437	3.98857	-22.13065	-6.15671
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.537	55.081	.001	-14.1437	3.99908	-22.15774	-6.12962

Figure 4.2: Distribution of scores on pre-post – Experimental Group- Experimental

.05 (alpha)
 H0 : data are normal
 H1 : data are not normal
 As the level of sig. should be less than .05:
 Sig < .05
 H0 is not rejected here, because > .05
 and > .05 so data are normal in pre/post test
 of the control group.
 The level of significance should be compared with
 05 (alpha)
 The observed *t*-value is -3.546 and the significance
 level is .001 which is well below the 05 level of
 significance. Therefore, this shows that the null
 hypothesis (H01) which states that there is no
 significant difference between the two groups is
 rejected.
 Therefore the research conclude that the impact of
 disintegration and syllabus mutilation on EFL
 learners and listening comprehension skill.

Findings

This study has reported a qualitative and
 quantitative study on the disintegration of culture
 from English language teaching and learning
 context, materials and activities the researcher has
 carried out a critical linguistic study of the next
 series.

In the next step the researcher found out that text-
 books are all written and published under academic
 standards and supervisions, so there is no need for
 censorship, further more. There is no points in doing
 so in order to prevent from cultural invasions , since
 our students live in a modern world where satellite
 and internet have paved the way for them to be in
 contact with other cultures and ideas. They are
 mature enough to make their own decisions
 regardingly.

This study has worked on books of teaching
 English and learners of English, therefore, it has
 some ideas to add to the field as well as some
 implications.

Implications

The findings of this study may have different
 implications from several aspects among which
 sociological, and pedagogical implications are
 worth-discussing.

Sociological implication

Our country as an Islamic country has always been
 trying to establish a firm connection between its
 Iranian culture and the Islamic value system thus at
 least at the surface level asserting strong oppositions

towards other cultures. However sociologically
 speaking it is quite natural and even inevitable for
 cultures to be exchanging values and viewpoints
 dynamically as they interact. Yet, what we encounter
 in the mass media and educational systems as
 institutes controlled by the power system of the
 society is a bunch of negative attitudes towards
 western cultural impact. This may be due to the
 differences in what we hold to be right as an Islamic
 society and what is believed to be OK with western
 societies. One of the main worries of many parents in
 our society is that children will be influenced by the
 cultural values of other communities and become
 non- Islamic or non-Iranian.

This study shows that cultural disintegration does
 not occur through one book only. If these control
 values are presented in one book which is used for
 teaching English it does not become part of the
 learners' belief system if they find the book
 censorship respectable.

Implications for Syllabus Design

Implications for syllabus design and material
 development can be summarized as below:

1. This study shows that Extra series do contain
 cultural values. This presentation of values is done in
 a subtle and clever way. This can be good model for
 syllabus designers and material developers to take
 this possibility in to account when designing course
 materials. The culture of day-to-day conversational
 conventions such as greetings, farewells, forms of
 address, thanking, making requests, and giving or
 receiving compliments means more than just being
 able to produce grammatical sentences.

2. It seems ,however, that the learners would prefer
 the uncensored material better. They disliked the
 idea of having an absolute authority as a super-being
 to decide on what they read or see. In addition the
 very fact is that the idea of censorship is very
 unrealistic at least in the present world of ever
 growing communication technology. One can
 hardly ever control or filter the flow of information
 rushing in from satellite and internet. Therefore what
 seems a more reasonable alternative is to include
 cultural values and teach them to students and let
 them discover things by their own to analyze
 viewpoints and compare them with their own
 culture. This is the departure point of the present
 study from what we earlier called culture
 disintegration and text mutilation. Finally some
 implications of the present study for the process of
 teaching are presented below.

Implications for teaching

Almost all teachers are aware of the
 interdependency of culture and language. They have
 also shown that they do try to give cultural awareness
 to their students. These teachers should also come to
 know about cultural values which are implicitly put
 into the books so that they will be aware of what they
 are teaching.

Only when teachers are made aware of the
 existence of such values, can they be asked to clarify
 things for the students. Teachers can elaborate on the
 cultural values in their classrooms and provide
 students with further options for observing the world
 around them and acting in more conscious ways.
 However if such is the case the students will become
 aware of the target culture differences and reject or
 internalize its values and viewpoints.

Since students in EFL contexts are usually brought
 up in their native cultural system some of them may
 even resist getting familiar with a new system, of
 beliefs because they hold their own culture in
 esteem. Teachers therefore have to be very careful
 not to say anything demeaning, humiliating or
 degrading about the students' cultural system. In so
 doing the teaching may even have a largely
 demotivating effect on students' learning process.

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