

## The Effect of Cultural Adaptation on EFL Reading Comprehension: The Role of Narrative Nativization and Foreign Language Attitude

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined the effect of cultural background knowledge on reading comprehension at inference and literal levels which was gained through reading an American short story that depicted either culturally familiar (nativized) or culturally unfamiliar (original) versions of the story. Subjects were intermediate level EFL learners studying English at a language institute in Iran. They answered true/false and multiple choice comprehension questions aimed at measuring the inference and literal comprehension over two versions of the story. They then completed a general attitude questionnaire showing their views toward nativization of short stories. Results revealed significant effect of cultural familiarity on inference and literal reading comprehension as well as negative attitude of Persian EFL learners toward nativized stories. Possible explanations are provided and the implications for the paradigm of English as an International Language are discussed.*

*Keywords: inference; literal comprehension; schemas; attitude; nativization/cultural adaptation*

### INTRODUCTION

The development of schema theory in cognitive science has influenced L2 reading comprehension since 1970. The hallmark of this theory, according to Brown (2001) is the fact that the text, by itself does not carry meaning; it is the reader that brings information, knowledge, emotion, and culture to the text. Namely, the reader constructs the intended meaning through interaction with the text and his prior knowledge in which the input is mapped against the existing schemas of the reader. This notion is similar to what Stanovich's (2000) interactive-compensatory model introduces. The model states many processes are involved in reading comprehension. A reader might draw on any resources available to him to understand a text including his cultural information and background.

Following schema theory, prior knowledge gained a significant role in comprehension. A number of studies found that there is a meaningful relationship between reader's activations of prior knowledge by a text and reading comprehension (Chang 2006, Hammadou 2000, Kendeou & van den Broek 2007, Keshavarz, Atai, & Ahmadi 2007, Leeser 2007). They illustrated that possessing appropriate prior knowledge could facilitate the

comprehension of unfamiliar texts. Bartlett (1932) was the first person who studied the effect of schemata on reading comprehension. In his study, English participants were asked to read and recall a story from an unfamiliar cultural framework, and the findings showed that the recall was not accurate. Distortions found in the recalling of the story conformed to the past experiences of the readers, and elaborations in the recalling caused redundancies.

Regarding background knowledge, culture may play a crucial role in readers' comprehension. Since culture can deliver a sense of expectation and prediction about the structure or sometimes content of a text, it consequently makes the text familiar to readers. In this respect, cultural schema (Yule 1996), abstract schema (Oller 1995), linguistic schema (Ketchum 2006), or story schema (Mandler 1984) are all terms indicating a cognitive structure of readers that enabled them to comprehend and reconstruct a text by their cultural information. In addition, some studies aim at demonstrating the importance of cultural schemata in L2 reading (Carrell & Eisterhold 1983, Johnson 1982). For instance Johnson (1982) investigated the effect of the cultural origin of prose on reading comprehension of Persian intermediate and advanced ESL students at the university level. The results revealed that the cultural origin of the stories influenced reading comprehension to a significant degree more than the syntactic or semantic complexity of the text. Some other studies have shown similar results in that participants comprehended better those texts that were similar to their native cultures or were more familiar to them (Abu-Rabia 1996 2003, Ammon 1987, Carrell 1983, Yuet & Chan 2003). Concerning methodology, most studies investigated two groups of participants with different cultural schemata and two reading texts which were tried to be rhetorically and linguistically equal. One of the texts was about the cultural background of the first group and another one presupposed the cultural background of the second group. Results mostly revealed that each group could understand the text which presupposed their own native culture better than the other.

Recent research on the role of cultural schemata in L2 reading comprehension has concentrated on two groups of participants with the same cultural background and one reading text in two different versions. That is, some words in the original text which were culturally unfamiliar are adapted to more familiar ones in the nativized version. Then one group reads the culturally familiar version and the other group reads the culturally unfamiliar text. The earliest study of this type dates back to a research done by Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller (1989). With regard to the assumption that "very simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carry with them some fairly subtle semantic and pragmatic information" (Chihara et al. 1989, p. 144), they replaced several English unfamiliar words (e.g. Nicholas, Athen, Klein) with Japanese familiar words (Ben, Osaka, Daiei) and left all other words intact. Having controlled other possible intervening variables, Chihara et al. (1989) found that, subjects performed notably better on the modified (i.e. culturally familiar) version than on the original version of the texts. It seems nativizing a text and changing the culture specific words in the original text into ones more familiar to the readers can help L2 readers to identify and find some common ground with the text.

Using more culturally familiar terms to modify the original English text was widely employed by (Alptekin 2006) who established the concept of cultural nativization in reading comprehension. Introducing cultural nativization, Alptekin (2006) defines it as "sociological, semantic and pragmatic adaptation of the textual and contextual cues of the original story into the learner's own culture, while keeping its linguistic and rhetorical content essentially intact" (p. 499). According to him, settings, locations, characters and occupations are counted as textual cues. Moreover, culture-specific customs, rituals, notions, structures, and values are described as contextual cues. Concerning the concept of nativization introduced by Alptekin (2006), Erten and Razi (2003) carried out a study in which they employed a reading text in two versions; one is the original American short story and the other a nativized Turkish short

story. Their study aimed at examining the effect of reading activity and nativization on reading comprehension. The results revealed a better comprehension of the nativized story, showing a powerful impact of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension.

More relevant to this study, Alptekin (2006) concentrated on the role of culturally familiar background knowledge in literal and inferential comprehension in L2 reading. The study was conducted with 98 advanced EFL students at a university in Turkey. The 1st group of students read an original short story while the 2nd group of students read the nativized (i.e. culturally familiar) version. Learners' inferential and literal comprehension was checked separately through multiple-choice comprehension questions. The findings demonstrated that by nativizing the culture specific elements of a short story into those culturally more familiar, Turkish students were able to make better inferences when they read the nativized story. That is, nativization contributed to the comprehension of the original story. Moreover, Alptekin's findings support Oller's (1995) claim that replacing certain words in authentic texts with more familiar ones facilitates reading comprehension.

Although the above studies have provided valuable information concerning the effect of nativization on reading comprehension, these studies suffer from some limitations. First, few studies have researched the level of comprehension in which nativization is most effective. That is, apart from Alptekin's (2006) which has investigated nativization with regard to both literal and inferential comprehension, other studies have been mainly concerned about reading comprehension as a whole. This is a problematic issue since nativization and familiar cultural schemata may impose different degrees of cognitive load (Sweller 1994) associated with literal or inferential reading activities on cognition. Rupp, Ferne and Choi (2006) indicated that inference questions that cause readers to engage with the whole text are perceived as being very challenging. This is because making inferences is essential to the construction of the mental representation of the text. As such, inferences of the type that produce novel knowledge derived from textual content require more resource-demanding control processes in that they go beyond the text-base in order to integrate it with the reader's prior knowledge. Thus, generating inferences enables readers to move from the semantically 'shallow' text-base to the semantically 'deep' situation model (Perfetti 1999). Literal understanding, however, which normally rests on lower-order conceptual and linguistic operations primarily at the text-base level, cannot be said to be as cognitively demanding as inferential comprehension, because it does not entail a high degree of controlled processing (Alptekin & Ercetin 2010). Thus, analyzing the two levels of comprehension separately, may allow us to have a better grasp of the role of nativization in reading comprehension.

Moreover, there is still a gap in our knowledge about the attitude of EFL learners to nativization. Knowing the attitude of students toward the adaptation of cultural elements would be of great advantage in designing EFL text books since culture plays a significant role in language pedagogy.

Concerning the limitations of previous research, it would be worth replicating and extending these studies to achieve a better understanding of the role nativization plays in reading comprehension. To reach this goal this study was designed to first examine the role of nativization of short stories in drawing inferences and understanding the surface meanings of the text which are respectively called inference and literal comprehension and then to investigate the attitude of Persian EFL learners towards nativization in reading texts through a questionnaire and interviews.

More specifically the first purpose of this study is to understand in which level of comprehension, literal or inference, nativization is mostly effective in L2 reading. To do so, the same story is used in two different versions – the original English version and its corresponding nativized version. It is thought that due to the cultural familiarity of the

nativized version in instances of schema activation, L2 readers would perform significantly better on the nativized version in both literal and inference level.

The second purpose of the study is to uncover the attitude of EFL learners toward nativization. To optimize validity and reliability, two different instruments were employed: questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers for the purpose of the present study which was to tap on the different aspects of nativization as were described by Alptekin (2006). In addition, interviews were conducted to ensure the validity of the questionnaires' findings. In summary, this study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Does nativization affect Iranian EFL learners' inference and literal comprehension of a short story?
2. What is the attitude of Persian L2 readers toward nativization of short stories?

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Sixty (22 male, 38 female; age range of 18 to 32) intermediate level EFL learners were recruited from an English language institute in Iran. The participants in this study had learned English in instructed setting for about 2-3 years and they were considered as intermediate level learners according to the language center's standards and Oxford Placement Test which they had taken. The participants were assigned to two equivalent English proficiency groups based on the OPT results. As shown in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of both groups are almost the same.

TABLE 1. The t-test mean differences on the OPT results

Groups		N	Means	SD	Sig
Nativized group	Female	14	40.41	12.57	1.06
	Male	16			
Original group	Female	8	40.32	12.17	1.01
	Male	22			

It should be noted that the age gap would not affect the results since there were only two participants over 25. In this connection, excluding the two participants would diminish the age gap to 7 years. Hence, the authors surmised that the inclusion of the two extreme cases would not affect the results. Moreover, given the lack of access to more female participants in the institute under investigation, the authors had to suffice to 8 female participants in the original group.

### MATERIAL

For the purpose of this study, a number of instruments, such as reading comprehension test, attitude questionnaire, and interview, were prepared and utilized; they will be described and delineated in this section in the following order.

#### SELECTION AND NATIVIZATION PROCESS OF READING TEXT

Following the policy of using the same text in two versions, one being the original and the other a culturally nativized version, for examining the role of cultural schemas in L2 reading

comprehension, the study tries to reduce the possible bias posed by different levels of conceptual density and complexity in reading contexts. The story *The Girls in their Summer Dresses* by the American writer Irwin Shaw (2000), was selected. It is about a couple spending their Sunday in the streets of New York. This story was adopted from Erten and Razi (2009).

Following Alptekin (2006), the reading text was nativized to reflect the Persian culture textually and contextually. Textual clues that were nativized included data such as: settings, characters, locations, and occupations as have been depicted in Table 2:

TABLE 2. Examples of textually nativized clue

Original version	Nativized version
New York	Isfahan
Fifth Avenue	Nazar Street
Washington Square	Tohid Street
Ohio	Shiraz
November	Aban
Frances	Farzaneh
Michael	Masood
Italian girls	Turk girls

Contextual clues involved culture specific customs, rituals, notions, structures and values as demonstrated in Table 3:

TABLE 3. Examples of contextually nativized clues

Original version	Nativized version
Hat	Scarf
Short skirt	Short manteau
Brandy	Milkshake
The actresses	The volleyball players
Phonograph needles	Clothes
Bar	Coffee shop
Steak	Kebab
Frances leaned over and kissed him on the tip of the ear	Farzaneh casted a look full of love to him

#### READING COMPREHENSION TEST

A twenty item test was designed to measure the inference and literal comprehension (10 items each) of the participants in true/ false and multiple choice formats following rubrics posed by Hughes (2003). Employing such formats would be objective since they eliminate the subjective factors which may be involved in marking. Also, true/ false and multiple choice formats are efficient in that they take less time to complete.

The test was constructed in two versions; one from the original text and the other from the nativized text according to Day and Park's (2005) classifications of reading comprehension questions. Literal questions were designed to examine the understanding of the information which is presented in a straightforward manner in a story, and inference questions were intended to measure the interpretation obtained from the text. The two versions of the test were identical except for some particular phrases with culture-specific references. In addition, the number of inference and literal questions was equal in the test.

In order to check the validity of the test, it was piloted with a similar sample of students with the same characteristics in addition to the same level of language proficiency. The purpose was to recognize the items that were too easy or too difficult. Results showed that three items were not appropriate and they were changed to meet the aim of the test.

The reliability of the reading tests was verified by means of the internal consistency of responses to the items that made up each test. The Cronbach alpha coefficients all exceeded 0.75 (generally considered to demonstrate a satisfactory level of reliability in social science research).

#### ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

Considering Alptekin's (2006) definition of nativization, an attitude questionnaire was constructed in Likert scale using a 5-point scale; ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was used to examine the attitude of EFL learners toward nativizing of short stories in three dimensions of culture including sociological, semantic and pragmatic aspects. The aesthetic dimension which taps on the literary aspects of culture was not considered here because it is thought to be irrelevant to the study. Also, to examine the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated ( $\alpha=0.784$ ) suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

#### INTERVIEW

Individual 15- minute interviews were conducted with 24 participants randomly chosen. They were asked if they prefer to read nativized English stories in which all the culture specific concepts are converted to Persian culture. Moreover, they were asked to elaborate and explain their reasons to support their answers. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Thus, the data set included the completed questionnaires and transcripts of the interviews. Interviewing helped to establish rapport with the subjects. Such rapport helped to bring out detailed information about the learners' personal beliefs, details that might not have been possible to access simply through questionnaires.

#### PROCEDURE

The original text was given to one group and the nativized version was given to the other group. The participants were asked to read the story and answer the reading comprehension questions in about 40 minutes. Both groups were then provided with the attitude questionnaire to express their opinions regarding nativization. They were given as much time as needed to complete the questionnaire. Both groups were under to the same testing conditions. Participants were not allowed to use a dictionary or ask for help during test administration. This decision was made because the study was intended to examine how learners handle their tasks solely depending on a given task condition without any external feedback.

#### RESULTS

As indicated earlier, this study examined the effect of cultural background knowledge on reading comprehension at inference and literal levels. Furthermore, it investigated the attitude of Iranian EFL learners towards nativization of English short stories. In what follows, the results of reading comprehension tests, questionnaires and interviews will be reported separately.

#### READING COMPREHENSION

Independent sample t-tests were conducted on Literal and inferential questions (10 items each) separately, to find out whether the difference between reading comprehension of two

groups (i.e. nativized and original) is at inference, literal, or both levels of comprehension. Results are presented below:

TABLE 4. The effect of nativization on inference and literal comprehension

Groups		N	Mean s	SD	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)*	Effect size (eta squared)
Literal	Nativized	15	8.16	1.74	3.03	22	0.002	.08
	Original	15	7.08	1.50				
Inference	Nativized	15	6.71	1.16	3.21	22	0.003	.07
	Original	15	5.83	1.26				

\*Differences are significant at .05 or less

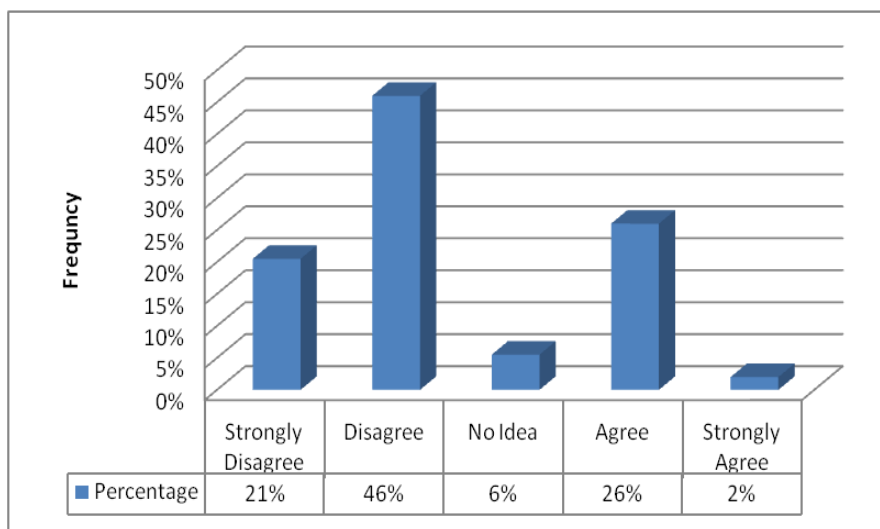
The results of the independent sample t-test shown in Table 4 revealed that the differences in the groups are statistically significant (p= .002 and p= .003). As shown in Table 4, the nativized group possesses a higher mean score (M=8.16 > 7.08) than that of the original group (M=6.71 > 5.83) in both inference and literal comprehension. As such, although both groups, nativized and original, had an equal level of language proficiency, those who read the nativized story drew more inferences and understood the straightforward meaning of the text better than those who read the original one. As a result, nativization of a short story from a different cultural background regarding L2 readers’ inference and literal comprehension was significant.

In the light of the analysis of the data, it seems nativization of culture specific words and phrases in a short story has a positive effect on both inference and literal comprehension of readers.

#### ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

The responses of the participants regarding their view toward nativization of English short stories were calculated and presented in the graph below. As demonstrated, most of the participants disagree with the process of nativization and support originality of the stories.

GRAPH 1. Attitude of Persian EFL learners toward nativization



A more detailed analysis of the questionnaire for further clarification of the point:

To specify participants’ attitude toward nativization a descriptive analysis was used. As shown on the graph, most participants who received the nativized version of the reading --

about 21% and 46 % respectively-- “strongly disagree” and “disagree” with the nativization of short stories in reading texts. Besides, about 28% of the questionnaire respondents supported nativization. Approximately 6% of all the participants, however, had no idea in this respect.

More specifically, most of the respondents (67 percent) did not favor changing the English names of cities, avenues and streets into Persian. As shown in Table 5 below, 87% of all participants believed that changing all English drinks to Persian ones would not lead to a more interesting story. Moreover, about 84.8 percent considered nativization of English customs, food, currencies and dates unfavorable. Approximately, 83.5 percent of the participants were not satisfied with changing English idioms into Persian ones. In addition, about 80.5 percent of the respondents did not support adaptation of English characters in stories.

It can be concluded that even though nativization improves participants’ reading comprehension, they prefer to read English stories with English context and culture.

TABLE 5. Frequencies for attitude toward nativization

Items	Strongly Agree%	Agree%	No idea%	Disagree%	Strongly Disagree%
1. I would like English customs to be replaced by Persian ones in the stories, e.g: Christman → Norouz	4.3	8.7	2.2	43.5	41.3
2. I would like to change the name of cities, avenues and streets into Persian, e.g: New York → Tehran	4.3	4.3	6.5	47.8	39.0
3. I would like the story more if the dates and months were in Persian, e.g: February → Bahman	2.2	13.0	0	56.5	28.3
4. I would like to change the name of English food into Persian, e.g: Stake → Kotlet	0	6.5	8.7	43.5	41.3
5. I would like the story more if the names of the characters were in Persian, e.g: Edward → Ahmad	0	8.7	10.9	43.5	37.0
6. I'd like to learn about English culture when I read English stories.	78.3	19.6	0	2.2	0
7. The stories would be more interesting if all the English drinks changed to Persian ones, e.g: wine → orange juice	0	4.3	8.7	41.3	45.7
8. I would enjoy the story more if the currencies were in Toman or Rial, e.g: Dollar → Toman	2.2	8.7	4.3	47.8	37.0
9. It would be better if all the English idioms changed to Persian ones.	0	6.5	0	43.5	50.0

#### INTERVIEW

The data obtained from the interviews are generally in tune with those of the questionnaire. Specifically, although 86.6 percent of all the interviewees (24) expressed a clear preference for the original version of English short stories, the rest of the interviewees agreed with the



process of nativization and expressed their reasons in terms of comprehension. They maintained that since the English and Persian cultures are different, nativization helps the story to become more tangible and reduces ambiguity in the stories. Moreover, some of the interviewees who preferred reading original stories stated their preference in a number of reasons. First, they favored the originality of the stories since it helps them to get familiar with other cultures. They stated that since language and culture are inseparable, learning a new language means learning a new culture, and nativization hinders this process. Some of their responses are as follow:

- a. Setareh: “I disagree with nativization because by reading English stories I expect to adventure in a new world not reminding me of my own culture”.
- b. Nima: “I strongly disagree. I personally prefer everything to be in the original way.  
Originality is the best. Besides if we only read passages in our own context and culture, how can we ever be acquainted with other cultures and customs? Are we supposed to tack ourselves in ‘our own little small world’ and not let anyone else in?”

Second, they explained when they read an English story they like it to have an English atmosphere and context since it gives them the real pleasure of reading stories whereas nativization turns the stories into fake ones:

- c. Mina: “Nativization does not give me the real pleasure I want. Because when it is the original text I can completely touch it, understand it and enjoy it”.
- d. Afshin: “Nativization makes the passage seems artificial and the readers cannot enjoy enough”.

Those who supported the nativized stories mentioned ease of comprehension as the main factor in their advocacy:

- e. Zahra: “I think this way the story becomes more tangible and there would be no ambiguous parts in the story”.
- f. Ayda: “Cause the two cultures are different we can get all the details and story better”.

The subjects’ beliefs in the interview were then compared with their answers that had been stated in the questionnaire. Comparisons were made between the responses in the two sections, as a form of response triangulation. It was clear from the learners’ responses to the questionnaire and interviews that their beliefs represented an interconnected system where some beliefs were central. These core beliefs were seen to oppose nativization. Results from the questionnaires showed that 87% of the participants dislike the process of nativization and support originality of the stories. The findings of the interview suggested that 86.6% of all the interviewees disagreed with nativization of English short stories. The interview findings, triangulated with the data collected from the questionnaire, support the interpretation that Persian EFL learners’ attitude toward cultural adaptation in L2 reading is negative.

## DISCUSSION

To understand the impact of nativization of culture specific words on literal and inference comprehension that was encountered in a short story as well as to examine the attitude of Persian EFL learners to nativization, the following discussion first seeks the grounds for the influence of nativization on comprehension and then for the negative attitude of language

learners toward nativization. In what follows, the findings obtained regarding each research question will be discussed in turn.

The first research question addressed the effect of cultural nativization on Iranian EFL learners' inference and literal comprehension of a short story. Results suggested that cultural nativization had a positive effect on L2 reading comprehension. The findings of this study confirmed the results reported by Erten and Razi (2009), Keshavarz, et al. (2007), and Razi (2004), nearly all of which found that readers' familiarity with the culture specific content of a text plays a facilitative role in reading comprehension. These results can be supported by a number of reasons.

A possible interpretation might lie in the point that, as Yuet and Chan (2003) maintain, the adaptation of the culture specific words in the short story contribute to the activation of and use of appropriate knowledge or schema. As such, since culture specific textual and contextual clues were nativized to reflect Persian culture, subjects who read the nativized story could successfully activate their cultural and content schemas, which in turn resulted in better comprehension of the story at both inference and literal levels. In the original version of the story, for instance, the couple is supposed to be watching a football game, a situation that is typically played out in a foreign culture but not in participants' native culture, since women are banned from going to football stadiums in Iran. In the same vein, the subjects seem to be more familiar with the scene in which people are playing volleyball than with that of an actress waiting to be picked up by a producer, or with such places as coffee shops rather than bars since these situations, although typical in some foreign cultures, are unusual and seen as weird in Persian cultural environment. Thus, nativization appears to create a sense of cultural intimacy or a feeling of being 'at home' with the story plot (Alptekin 2006).

The positive effect of nativization in L2 reading comprehension can be explained by reference to Stanovich's (2000) interactive-compensatory model. Taking into account the individual differences, an interactive-compensatory model of reading makes heavy use of the idea of cognitive resource allocation in that it synthesizes information provided simultaneously from several knowledge sources. With regard to this reading model, the subjects who read the nativized text may compensate for their possible deficiencies in comprehension by drawing on their cultural schemas. Hence, their comprehension of the story is enhanced.

Another support for the effective role of nativization in reading comprehension comes from the notion of abstract schema (Oller 1995). It is also called linguistic schema (Ketchum 2006), cultural schema (Yule 1996) or story schema (Mandler 1984). Apart from minor terminological differences, these various models are thus in general agreement about the underlying abstract schema informing the story's informal organization. Abstract schema is described as internalized representation of story structure. It consists of sets of expectations about the structural make up and conceptual organization of stories (Klapproth 2004). This cognitive structure enables readers to reconstruct the author's message by predicting the way in which texts progress. As Oller (1995) maintains, abstract schema is 'non-syntacticized', that is, not dependent on the syntactic arrangement of the surface forms in the text, thus conducive to rich comprehension. As such, subjects who read the nativized story could reach a greater comprehension by reconstructing the message through activation of the relevant schemata.

Our study indicated that familiar textual and contextual clues from a target language culture would enable Persian intermediate EFL readers to draw deeper inferences and to have richer literal understanding of the text. These findings provide further support for schema-theoretic and knowledge-based theories of learning (Anderson 1978) in which the possession of appropriate background knowledge in the construction of schemas is valued. The results

provide additional evidence in support of the studies by Erten and Razi (2003), Chihara et al. (1989), Razi (2004) and Sasaki (2000) which have demonstrated that adapting short stories to meet learners' cultural expectations enhances their reading comprehension. Although the current study and Erten and Razi's (2003) shared the same reading text and came up with the similar results that nativization has a facilitating role in reading comprehension, the approaches were diverse. Erten and Razi's study was concerned about reading comprehension as a whole while this study narrowed down the comprehension to literal and inference. Moreover, the type of questions employed to assess the comprehension was different. Therefore, the possibility of generalization of the results is higher. These findings, however, do not conform to that of Alptekin (2006, p. 502) who concluded that nativization plays a facilitative role mainly in readers' inference comprehension and "literal comprehension in the L2 is not necessarily affected by the reader's level of familiarity with the culture-specific content of the text". This conclusion could be attributed to the background of his subjects since some of them had graduated from English-medium high schools in Turkey where, as Alptekin claims, they had been familiarized with the culture of English-speaking countries to some extent.

In addition, the current study yielded results that corroborate findings from a large number of earlier studies which explored the effect of cultural schemata on reading comprehension (Abu-Rabia 1996, 2003, Carrell 1987, Droop & Verhoeven 1998, Johnson 1981, Pritchard 1990). Compatible with the results of these studies, the findings of the current study showed that readers were better able to understand culturally familiar texts than culturally unfamiliar or less familiar texts.

The second research question concerned the attitude of Persian L2 readers toward nativization of short stories. Results from the questionnaire and interviews revealed that Persian learners are eager to improve their cultural competence by reading an original story weltered in its own culture. The EFL subjects justified their interests in reading the original stories by referring to their pleasure gain from these stories as well as their incentive to learn about other cultures in reading stories. In other words, although nativization had a facilitative role in reading comprehension, Persian EFL learners did not support it. This goes against what is suggested by Erten and Razi (2009). They believed when students see elements of their local culture in the nativized story, they feel much more engaged and identify themselves with the context of the text, which led to a better reading comprehension. However, learner variables such as personality, proficiency, and learning style might cause it to be difficult to examine this issue. Overall, these differences warrant additional research and are the subject of continuous analysis.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of the present study clarify the effect of cultural familiarity, that of nativization on inference and literal understanding in reading comprehension. In addition, the study considered the general attitude of Persian EFL learners toward the nature of nativization in short stories. In general, there is a meaningful relationship between nativization and reading comprehension at both the inference and literal levels. Moreover, participants did not support nativization of culture specific words in English short stories, and they expressed their positive attitude toward studying the original English stories.

Regarding the role of nativization on L2 reading comprehension for EFL learners, findings offer some noteworthy implications. To begin with, EFL teachers should consider whether the cultural schemata in the reading contexts are familiar to the learners. If they are not, learners may fail to comprehend the text due to lack of awareness of the culture-specific

content. The reason is that meaning does not exist in the text but in the dynamic interaction between reader's cognition and the text (Jalilifar & Assi 2008). Nativization, therefore, places the reader in a familiar context in which they are attempting to proceed. Secondly, since it was found that nativization improves reading comprehension, it might provide benefits to use some nativized stories in EFL teaching books. So, nativization could be considered as a new technique for material designers to provide more familiar cultural content. However, despite the facilitative effect of nativization, the attitude of learners should be counted as well.

Moreover, as English is spreading extensively throughout the globe and so is the teaching of English as an International Language (EIL), emphasis has been put on localized varieties of English, known as World Englishes, as well as on local cultures. While English continues its movement toward a de-nationalized and global language to communicate people's ideas and cultures, it also becomes localized; a process Sharifian (2010) called glocalisation of English. Considering the results of the current study, the subjects' attitudes towards nativization is not positive, and this runs against localization of English. However, the findings of this study need to be verified against future research involving more representative samples. Moving toward EIL, localization of English should be done with care, and more research should be conducted to make this conceptualization more clear and operational. To do so, we need to probe into the learners' and teachers' beliefs and motivation regarding the nature of L2 and learning it. This way, we may be able to move toward how to make localisation possible.

Future studies may consider other levels of comprehension in reading comprehension of nativized stories with different forms of comprehension questions. The results of this study could also be verified by employing lengthier texts with EFL learners in different age, gender and language proficiency levels. In addition, this study was mainly concerned about the attitude of EFL learners toward nativization and EFL teacher's attitude was not addressed. Finally, it might be of great advantage to investigate learner's beliefs and motivations in relation to nativization of culture specific words.

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