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The Effect of Cultural Nativisation on Dioula Speakers Learning Vocabulary in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This classroom action research is a case-study. It attempts to find out the role of local culture in the learning of English as a foreign language. More specifically, the study struggles demonstrate the contribution of learners' own culture in the understanding of vocabulary in EFL literary texts. A questionnaire, a language test and a classroom observation protocol served for the data collection instruments. A demonstration lesson was used as a pedagogical material. The participants are Dioula speakers learning English as foreign language. These learners are students of Arts option at the 'Lycée Départemental de Toussiana', in Burkina Faso. Toussiana is Dioula speaking locality. The sample is chosen purposively using non-probability technique. A preliminary work on the students' socio-linguistic background was conducted in order to obtain a sample of 38 participants out of 120 following an alphabetical list. They are composed of native Dioula speakers and non-native Dioula speakers who are, then, divided into two groups: nativized group (19) and a non-nativized group (19). The data are analysed qualitatively and quantitatively and the Statistical Package in Social Services (SPSS), version 26.0 (2024) is deployed to process the quantitative data. The results indicated that the nativized group outperformed the non-nativized group. These findings imply that if students learn vocabulary in English as foreign language relying on their own culture, they can easily grasp word meanings in that language.

Key words: Culture, EFL, first language, literary text, nativisation, vocabulary.

L'effet de la nativisation culturelle sur des locuteurs dioula apprenant le vocabulaire en anglais comme langue étrangère

Résumé

Cette recherche-action est une étude de cas. Elle vise à déterminer le rôle de la culture locale dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Plus précisément, l'étude vise à démontrer la contribution de la culture locale à la compréhension du vocabulaire dans les textes littéraires en anglais comme langue étrangère. Un questionnaire, un test de langue et un protocole d'observation en classe ont servi d'instruments de collecte de données. Une leçon de démonstration a servi de support pédagogique. Les participants sont des locuteurs Dioula apprenant l'anglais comme langue étrangère. Ces apprenants sont des élèves de la série littéraire du Lycée Départemental de Toussiana, au Burkina Faso. Toussiana est une localité Dioulaphone. L'échantillon est choisi intentionnellement à l'aide d'une technique non-probabiliste. Un travail préliminaire sur des informations sociolinguistiques des élèves a été mené afin d'obtenir un échantillon de 38 participants sur 120 selon une liste alphabétique. Ils sont composés de locuteurs dioula natifs et de locuteurs dioula non natifs, répartis en deux groupes: un groupe de locuteurs 'nativisés' (19) et un groupe de locuteurs 'non-nativisés' (19). Les données sont analysées qualitativement et quantitativement, et le logiciel SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Services), version 26.0 (2024) est utilisé pour traiter les données quantitatives. Les résultats indiquent que le groupe de locuteurs 'nativisés' a obtenu de meilleurs résultats que le groupe de 'non-nativisés'. Ces résultats suggèrent que les apprenants peuvent facilement saisir le sens des mots en anglais comme langue étrangère s'ils se basent sur leur propre culture pour apprendre le vocabulaire de cette langue.

Mots clés : Culture, EFL, langue maternelle, nativisation, texte littéraire, vocabulaire.

Introduction

The belief that learners must know more about English culture to communicate successfully with native speakers led language educators to fail to identify the two types of foreign language learning: foreign language learning in a native speaking environment and foreign language learning in a non-native speaking environment. In the first case, the learners leave their home country to learn the language in a native setting. There, the majority of the interlocutors are native speakers. In the second case, the learners stay in their home countries to learn the language where the majority of their interlocutors are non-native speakers. Failure to distinguish these types of foreign language resulted in adopting controversial foreign language teaching policies.

Since the advent of English, whether second or foreign language, its teaching has been English culture-oriented. That is to say, English language teaching emphasises on foreign culture to the detriment of local culture. The paradox is that English is learnt in an environment dominated by the local culture. Besides, in countries, like Burkina Faso, the EFL learners' interlocutors are mostly non-native speakers. What seems to be ignored is the quasi-impossibility to teach English culture as warned by Alptekin (2002) because English has more non-native speakers than native ones. The serious problem with English culture-oriented approach is the overlapping word meanings according to local culture and English culture which cause failure during the leaning of English as a foreign language (Kambou and Soma, 2020). Most often, students learn vocabulary which does not fit their communication needs regarding the culture of the learning environment. Consequently, the present study attempts to explore the approach of cultural nativisation applied to vocabulary learning through reading literary texts. It is a way to find out the effect of students' socio-cultural environment on their understanding of word meanings in EFL literary texts. Vocabulary can be implicitly taught through reading comprehension (Mohammadzadeh *et al.*, 2016) which implies the exploitation of literary texts. Since students cannot learn all vocabulary notions in class as observed by Ostovar and Malekpur (2015), they can autonomously increase their vocabulary knowledge by reading literary texts.

1. Research objectives and questions

As the purpose of this study is to find out whether the learners' culture contributes to the understanding of English vocabulary, the research objectives are:

1. To demonstrate that the students perform English vocabulary better referring to their culture to derive EFL word meanings.
2. To discover the participants' reactions when learning EFL vocabulary referring to local culture.
3. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of learning EFL vocabulary referring to the local culture.

The three (3) research objectives above generated the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the students perform English vocabulary better referring to their culture to derive EFL word meanings?
2. How do the participants react when learning EFL vocabulary referring to local culture?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of learning EFL vocabulary referring to local culture?

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theory of cultural nativization adapted from Pulido (2004) applied to vocabulary learning is used in this study. Nativization theory was first used by Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller (1989), according to Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh and Rezazadeh (2012). Chihara *et al.*'s (1989) study was later followed by Al-Fallay (1994), according to Jalilifar and Assi (2008). The authors (Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller, 1989) assume that "very simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carry with them some fairly subtle semantic and pragmatic information".

Researches on nativization theory are undertaken by Johnson (1981), Alptekin (2002), Alptekin (2003), Alptekin (2006), Jalilifar and Assi (2008), Rashidi and Soureshjani (2011), Gatabonton and Tucker (2013), Davoudi and Ramezan (2014), Fikray and Habil (2019), Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh and Rezazadeh (n.d.), Pulido (2004), Demir (2012), Kurnaz (2016) later refer to the theory as cultural nativization.

At this stage of the research, cultural nativization is defined as sociological, semantic and pragmatic adaptation of the textual and contextual cues of the original text into the learner's own culture, while keeping its linguistic and rhetorical content essentially intact (Alptekin, 2006). Cultural nativization consists in making use of the elements of visible culture and invisible culture by considering nativized texts, which proposes the adaptation of cultural elements in an authentic text into the foreign language learner's own culture. In the case of this study, the word meanings in an EFL text are adapted to the meaning of the equivalent ones in the learners' first culture.

Claiming that a language cannot be dissociated from its culture (Wardhaugh, 1998) is questionable because interference in target language is correct according to the norms of the source language. Besides, considering the quasi-impossibility to teach English culture (Alptekin, 2002) and interference which does not necessarily block meaning understanding cultural nativization applied to vocabulary can be an alternative to improve students' language learning. As noted by Richards (2006), in communication emphasis should be laid on what is said (i.e. message) and not how it is said (i.e. correct use of language).

As applied to this study, cultural nativization of vocabulary holds that Dioula speakers should be expected to easily derive the meanings of culturally-nativized words in EFL. The argument in support of this expectation is that students would be familiar with values and modes of thinking adapted to their socio-cultural environment.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Foreign Culture-oriented Studies

Koletnik's (2012) study reveals that the approach of translation promotes vocabulary acquisition and supports lexical teaching if exercises are varied, carefully selected for the use of language in authentic situations. Yet, Koletnik (2012) in his study failed to know that authentic situations are related to the cultural context of language use and the learning environment.

Alemi's (2011) suggestion that the teachers consider cultural competence in the selection of appropriate texts from the literature implies that culture plays a role in the learning of a foreign language. The findings that the cultural content of a foreign language textbook promotes culture (Gomez, 2015) and that literary texts really affect the students' cultural awareness in a positive way (Oktan and Kaymakamoglu, 2017) are seemingly useful to textbook designers.

Harandi and Fatemipour's (2016) quasi-experimental study reveals that using culture-bound texts improves EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. Likewise, Oktan and Kaymakamoglu (2017), Harandi and Fatemipour's (2016) findings fall short to provide insight into the issue of source language culture and vocabulary knowledge.

The results of an experimental study Rashidi and Soureshjani (2011) revealed that teaching culture elements of target language can have a remarkable impact on the performance of language learners on reading comprehension. The study also showed that culture teaching has a great role in improving the motivation level of language learners. Similarly, the results of a study by Davoudi and Ramezan (2014) showed that familiarity with culture of target language facilitates reading comprehension significantly. These results fall short to demonstrate that learners would perform poorly relying on their own culture since this aspect was not under the scope of the studies.

A culture class, according to the findings by Kovacs (2017) raises cultural awareness, changes attitudes towards native and target societies and expands vocabulary knowledge significantly. Studies oriented to target language culture failed to investigate the role first language culture in communication. Kambou and Soma (2020) indicated that interference due to overlapping word meanings between first language and foreign language cause lexico-semantic errors.

The analysis of the meaning of the Danish word *hygge* by Mouton (2012) indicated how the culture-specific semantic configuration of the word provides a window on Danish sociality and social values. A similar study by Moisejeva (2010) who undertook a semantic analysis of the English word *right* and its equivalents expressions in Italian revealed that there are numerous ways to express one and the same concept in different cultures. These various ways being dependent on local culture are evidence that the word meaning according to the English culture would not meet the learners' communicative needs.

3.2. Local Culture-oriented Studies

A large body of studies on the approach of nativization and reading comprehension can be found in Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller (1989), Jalilifar and Assi (2008), Al-Fallay (1994), Alptekin (2002, 2003, 2006), and Tavakoli, Shirinbakhsh and Rezazadeh (2012). The few studies which dealt with cultural nativization and vocabulary learning laid emphasis on the nativization of the names of political personalities, names of places, and great historical events as culture elements from the learning environment (Pulido, 2004; Demir, 2012; and Kurnaz, 2016). The findings of these studies support the assumption that 'nativizing' foreign story promotes better vocabulary memorisation.

Kurnaz (2016), in a quasi-experimental study, indicated that cultural familiarity based on nativized stories helps vocabulary learning. Even though the study does not show to what extent cultural familiarity helps vocabulary learning, these results establish a link between culture and vocabulary learning. The findings of the present study can fill in the gap in Kurnaz (2016) as culture is under its scope.

Torghabeh and Salavati (2015) investigated domestication and foreignization strategies in the process of translating two novels. The results confirmed that both strategies (domestication and foreignization) are used to translate the two English novels. The author fell short to demonstrate the extent to which domestication strategy which relates to cultural nativisation was applied in the translation of the two novels.

There is a gap in Soma (2014) who investigated students' understanding of word meanings in English as a foreign language referring to learners' culture though the findings are indicative. They indicated that students can succeed in learning vocabulary in English if the teaching takes into account the learners' culture. The results of this study, assessing vocabulary in context, are therefore supposed to fill that gap.

Ellis *et al.* (2015) showed that language interacts with cultural identity during semantic processing. This finding implies that true, culturally relevant information from the learning environment is integrated with more ease when it is presented in first language than in target language, even though translation equivalents are supposed to convey identical information in target language. This finding is also significant as far as the issue of learners' culture and semantic knowledge is concerned.

The intercultural differences which, according to Soltani (2016), should be highlighted and valued positively are evidence that source language culture must not be discarded during foreign teaching/learning. The significant out-performance during the translation of culture specific items based on source language-oriented strategies (80%) compared to target language-oriented strategies (20%) revealed by Mirzaei (2015) is also another evidence.

Tavakoli *et al.* (n.d.) 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. The 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.

Pulido (2004) examines the effects of cultural background knowledge on immediate incidental vocabulary gain through reading brief narratives that depicted either culturally familiar or culturally unfamiliar versions of everyday scenarios. The results revealed significant effects of cultural familiarity whereby vocabulary gains were greater after participants read within the culturally familiar versions of the scenarios. No significant effects were obtained for the variables of group or of L2 passage sight vocabulary, although a significant positive correlation was obtained on one passage.

Similarly, the results of a study by Jalilifar and Assi (2008) on the role of cultural nativization in reading comprehension of target language short stories illustrated that cultural nativization had a facilitative effect on the comprehension of the stories. Surprisingly, this effect was not only at the literal but also at the inferential level of comprehension. The findings of the study bear implications for EFL teachers and material designers.

4. Research Methods

The present applied research is conducted in the 'Lycée Départemental de Toussiana', Région des Hauts-Bassins in Burkina Faso. It is a classroom action research designed as a case-study. It adopted qualitative and quantitative methods. Thirty-eighty (38) secondary high school (SHS) participants are involved in this study. They are obtained after the analysis of preliminary data gathered on their socio-linguistic background. These participants frequently speak Dioula at home and outside the home. As students of the Arts option, they have spent at least 5 years in the learning of English as a foreign language. Their ages range between 17 and 28 years old. These participants (38) are purposively chosen using non-probability technique. They are then divided into a group of Dioula native speakers (19) and a group of non-native speakers (19). They supposedly meet the study requirements as they know more about the notion of culture. Besides, being students of the Arts option, they are very familiar with the activities of reading comprehension as the main tasks in the research instruments. Four EFL teachers are also involved in this study. One conducted the demonstration lesson and the other three ones were observers.

Thus, two texts are selected, shortened and adapted to meet the study requirements. The first one is entitled *Sanata's Wedding* extracted from *Livre de lecture 5^e année* by Institut Pédagogique du Burkina (2012) and the other one is entitled *Daniel and Chantal's Wedding* extracted from *Secret d'alcove* by Ignace Hien (1989). These texts are, then, faithfully translated from French into English. Some of the words in these two texts were nativized, i.e. their meanings were adapted to Dioula culture.

These two texts are used to construct the most important research instruments which are a language test and a classroom observation protocol. The language test is constructed in two versions: the nativized version for the nativized group and the non-nativized version for the non-nativized group. Each version of the language test was composed of guided commentary and translation. The instructions in both the nativized version and non-nativized version of the language test were the same. One reason for using a language test is that, likewise a journal (Whalley, 1995), a language test is truthful record of learners' actual performance during the process of language learning.

The classroom observation protocol is also constructed in two versions: one version for the nativized group and one for the non-nativized group. It is composed of four (4) major parts: the setting, the lesson and materials, the observation and the conclusions. Two pedagogical materials are used in this study: a text for reading comprehension and a demonstration lesson

plan. These two materials are for the nativized group. The lesson plan goes from the pre-reading stage, the while-reading stage, and the post-reading stage.

Ten students were selected to test the reliability and validity of the language test. Areas of difficulties or confusions helped improve the final versions of this instrument. The demonstration lesson plan was examined by a pedagogic advisor whose comments and suggestions were taken into account to improve this material to ensure its reliability and validity.

The data were collected in May 2022 corresponding to the school year 2021-2022. The data collection lasted two consecutive days. On the first day, the nativized group attended the demonstration lesson. The classroom observation was used simultaneously during that demonstration lesson. On the second day, both nativized and non-nativized group took the language test under the teachers' supervision to prevent them from sharing their answers with their neighbours.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are deployed to analyse the data. The language test is graded and the students' score are analysed quantitatively using comparative statistics. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Services) software version 26.0 (2024) is deployed for the matter.

To validate the results, the following statements were considered: a) if the mean score of the nativized group overweighs that of the non-nativized group, then participants perform English vocabulary better by deriving word meanings relying on local culture; b) if the observations after the demonstration lesson congruently indicate good performance from the nativized group, then participants positively reacted about learning EFL vocabulary referring to local culture.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1. Participants' performances (Language test)

Table 1: Results of participants' global performance

Nativized group					Non-nativized group				
Number	Maximum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number	Maximum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
19	2	17.50	9.1184	3.32851	19	2.75	11.75	6.5921	2.36615

Source: Field data, 2022

Based on the results in Table 1, the nativized group with 9.1184 as mean score outperformed the non-nativized group with a mean score of 6.5921. These results indicate that cultural nativisation positively affected the understanding of word meaning in the literary text. These findings corroborate with those by Mirzaei (2015) who showed a significant out-performance during the translation of culture specific items based on source language-oriented strategies (80%) compared to target language-oriented strategies (20%). These findings are also line with those by Pulido (2004) who indicated that cultural familiarity significantly affect vocabulary gains and those by Kurnaz (2016) whose quasi-experimental study indicated that cultural familiarity based on nativized stories helps vocabulary learning.

5.2. Participants' performances (Classroom observations)

Table 2: Overall Structure of the Lesson

Question items	Observer 1	Observer 2	Observer 3
1. Did the session exactly follow the lesson plan?	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Were there any adaptations?	No	No	No
3. What comments or suggestions do you have about the overall structure of the session?	No comment	No comment	No comment

Source: Field data, 2022

The congruent answers from the three observers in Table 2 above indicate that the demonstration lesson was taught as planned by the researcher. Therefore, the data that are collected and that are being analysed are valid and reliable.

Table 3: Objectives of the Lesson

Question items	Observer 1	Observer 2	Observer 3
1. How do you estimate the number of words whose meaning could be predicted by the students?	More than 3 words	More than 3 words	More than 3 words
2. How many good answers did the students get on the true or false statements?	More than 3 good answers	More than 3 good answers	More than 3 good answers
3. How many good answers did the students get of the form-based questions did the student, according to the text?	Less than 3 good answers	Less than 3 good answers	Less than 3 good answers
4. How do you estimate the number of students who got the good answers in the form-based questions?	Less than 10 students	Less than 10 students	Less than 10 students
5. How do you estimate the number of students' correct sentences with words that illustrate cultural elements in the Dioula community?	More than 5 sentences	5 sentences	More than 5 sentences

Source: Field data, 2022

In table 3, except for observer 2 with an answer of question 5 which is slightly different, the other two observers' answers corroborate. Despite this slight difference, these observations pertain students' success in finding out the right meanings of the words by reading the text. Performance below average is pointed out by the three observers as far as questions 3 and 4 are concerned. This low performance is possibly due to time constraints as content-based questions are often time-consuming and also too demanding.

Table 4: Students' reactions about the content of the Lesson

Question items	Observer 1	Observer 2	Observer 3
1. Did the students appear to understand the meaning of ' marrying woman ' as used in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Did the students appear to understand the meaning of ' son of a king ' as used in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Did the students appear to understand the meaning of ' marrying man ' as used in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Did the students appear to understand the meaning of ' daughter of a king ' as used in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Did the students appear to understand the meaning of ' home ' as used in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Could the students find the group of words corresponding to ' partner of a king ', in the text?	Yes	No	No

7. Could the students find the group of words referring to ' a girl on the day of her marriage ceremony ', in the text?	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Could the students find the group of words referring to ' male child of a king ', in the text?	No	Yes	No
9. Could the students find the group of words referring to ' a man on the day of his marriage ceremony ', in the text?	No	No	No
10. Could the students find the group of words referring to ' a female child of a king ', in the text?	No	Yes	No
11. Could the students find the group of words corresponding to ' places where activities are undertaken ', in the text?	Yes	No	No

Source: Field data, 2022

It is visible in Table 4 that there is congruence in the observations made on six questions (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7). Not only does this congruence indicates the participants good performance but it also denotes their positive reactions about deriving EFL word meaning referring to their local culture. One observer commented that they use these kinds of words in their daily life. Respectively, for each of questions 6, 8, 10 and 11, observer indicates good performance but the other two observers slightly point out bad performance. Incongruence in these observations makes it difficult to conclude whether the participants reacted positively about nativized vocabulary learning at this level. However, they are denoting areas of difficulties to derive word meanings referring to local culture. Only the observations made on question 9 are congruent denoting the participants' negative reactions about learning EFL word meanings relying on the local culture. In sum, with six congruent observations out of eleven which is more than average, one can conclude that the participants on the whole reacted positively about deriving EFL word meaning referring to the local culture while reading the literary texts. These positive reactions about cultural nativisation are strengthened by Jalilifar and Assi (2008) whose study illustrated that cultural nativization had a facilitative effect during the reading comprehension.

Table 5: Strong and Weak points on Learning words Relying on Cultural Nativization

Question items	Observer 1	Observer 2	Observer 3
1. Strong Points	By learning these words, the pupils will be familiar with their use.	The new words that they have learnt were adapted to their daily life.	Pupils will be familiar with the words, use them easily in the right context.
2. Weak Points	By learning these words, the pupils will have difficulties to know about the culture of the foreign people. e.g. marrying = bride	They can forget the simple word if they keep it in their minds.	This will not allow the students to know much about the other culture, especially the English culture.

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 5 displays strong and weak points on cultural nativisation. The strong points, likewise Tavakoli et al.'s (n.d.) findings denote positive effect of cultural familiarity on word meaning inferencing and literal reading comprehension. They also denote students' capacity to adapt their language needs to the learning environment for their daily communication. Claims like 'the pupils will be familiar with the words', use them easily in the right context' according to Observer 3, show that cultural nativisation reduce EFL students' failure deriving from the overlap in word meanings between local culture and that of native speakers as indicated by

Kambou and Soma (2020). The weak points, as Tavakoli *et al.*'s (n.d.) findings, highlight the participants' negative attitudes toward nativized versions of the texts. They also denote some limits of cultural nativisation as the learners do not have access to word meaning according to foreign culture. These limits are not so serious. They denote pedagogical implications with new paradigms as far as the issue of culture and foreign language teaching are concerned. Without any pretention to dissociate a language from its culture, foreign language teaching must first adopt local culture-oriented approach before opening the gate to foreign culture through foreign culture-oriented approach. This step-by-step approach can develop good intercultural communication and culture tolerance.

Conclusion

This study attempted to explore the approach of cultural nativisation applied to vocabulary learning through reading literary texts. It intended to demonstrate that students' local culture can contribute to improve their performance in English and facilitate communication. The analysis of the results revealed that the participants performed EFL vocabulary better by referring to their own culture when learning word meanings. The results also indicated that they would enjoy learning EFL word meaning by relying on their own culture as their good performance denoted positive reactions. The study also pointed out some strong and weak points as far as the cultural nativisation is concerned. The most important in these results is that they show the new paradigms to adopt for the teaching of foreign language in an environment dominated by the learners' own culture. These results imply the adoption of a step-by-step approach for the teaching of foreign language to develop good intercultural communication and culture tolerance. Yet, the study needs a replication through a longitudinal experimental approach.

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