

## **A study of Persian students' attitudes towards L1 and L2 cultures**

*Zahra Rezaei<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

One of the concerns of sociolinguistic approaches is the attitudes which L2 learners hold towards the L2, its speakers and the culture with which the language is associated. Many researches in this respect may include the determination of learners' motivation to learn the L2 and its indirect effect on the nature of SLA itself. The learners' attitude towards the target culture has an impact upon the acquisition of the language. Prodromou (1978). Positive attitude towards the target culture facilitates language acquisition. Robinson (1978).

This research examined a group of 30 BA students' (advanced, intermediate and elementary) opinion about the role of their foreign culture (i.e. American and British cultures) in achieving cultural understanding and proficiency of their second language through a survey analysis. The focus was upon how students consider the relationship between English and Persian cultures. To do this a questionnaire was presented to them to illuminate the learners' attitude and perception towards L1 and L2 cultures.

The results of the first questionnaire revealed that the students who were different in proficiency level were different in their attitudes, as well. Most of the participants had positive attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultures.

*Key terms: culture, cultural competence, foreign language, second language culture.*

### **Introduction**

The connection between language and culture has always been a concern of L2 teachers and educators. Whether culture of the target language is to be incorporated into L2 teaching has changed rapidly throughout language teaching history. In the course of time, the pendulum of ELT practitioners' opinion has swung against or for teaching culture in context of language teaching. Genc & Bada (2005). For example, during

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<sup>1</sup> - Islamic Azad university of Khorasgan [Zahrar\\_64@yahoo.com](mailto:Zahrar_64@yahoo.com) 2009

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the first decades of the 20th century researchers discussed the *importance* and *possibilities* of including cultural components into L2 curriculum ,Sysoyev & Donelson (2002); the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 70s marks a critical shift for teaching culture, for the paradigm shift from an approach based largely on form and structure to a plurality of approaches causing an unintended side effect: the negligence of culture. Pulverness ( 2003).

The concept of communicative competence stresses the role of context and circumstances under which language can be used precisely and properly. Many teachers and students talk about it without the exact knowledge of its meaning in reality. What most students and teachers do not pay much attention to is the fact that “knowledge of the grammatical system of a language (grammatical competence) has to be complemented by understanding of culture – specific meanings (communicative or rather cultural competence)” Byram, Morgan et al(1994) cultural competency, or proficiency, has become an important part of foreign language education . While attention has been given to target culture, the learners’ native culture has received relatively little and disorganized study. Tsai yu-Hsin (2001).

Sociolinguistic approaches have been concerned with attitudes which L2 learners have towards their L2, the people who speak it or the culture with which the language is associated. Many works done in this area show whether these attitudes are positive or negative maybe involved in determining a learners’ motivation to learn the L2, and indirectly influence the nature of SLA itself. As Prodromou (1978) states the learners’ attitude towards the target culture has an influence on the acquisition of the language. A positive attitude is a factor in language learning that leads to cross cultural understanding. Moreover, “research suggests a positive attitude toward the target culture facilitates language acquisition” Robinson (1978). Gardner and Lambert (1959) believed that there is an indirect relationship between attitude and successful SLA. Attitudes affect motivation, which in turn affect SLA. Negative attitude may lead to decreased motivation and because of decreased input and interaction it may lead to unsuccessful achievement of L2 proficiency.

Cross-cultural understanding is of great significance in any individual’s life. The study of various cultures assists students to get familiar with different people. In traditional methods of L2 teaching learners showed different degrees of difficulty in facing with L2 cultural situations appropriately. In the new methods of language teaching, L2

teachers can deal with this problem by focusing on L2 cultures and teaching language with due attention to cross-cultural differences between L1 and L2. it is also important to find ways of decreasing learners' negative feelings and attitudes toward the target language.

### **Methodology**

This study tends to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards L1 and L2 cultures. Hence, a group of 30 BA students of English translation in khorasgan Azad university was chosen. The students age ranged from 18-22 For this, a self-made questionnaire, related to students' attitude towards L1 and L2 cultures was used as an instrument. The questionnaire contained 33 questions in order to investigate how the students viewed the first and foreign language cultures. To this aim, a Likert scale (1931) was used to measure the participants' feelings or beliefs about the items in questions. Prior to the questionnaire, a Nelson proficiency test was administered to the students in order to give an insight into their language ability. The test included 50 multiple choice questions.

### **Data analysis**

In order to address the research question, the students were divided into three groups of proficiency namely advanced, intermediate, elementary based on the results obtained from the Nelson proficiency test. After this step, their answers to the questions were carefully analyzed. Hence, the total numerical value could be calculated according to their ratings on a five point Likert scale.

### **Results and discussions**

This paper represents a very short and foundational excursion into the vast domain of cultural studies. Most of the learners agreed that learning English culture and customs helped them to identify or understand Persian culture better. This attitude was very close to what most writers believed. For example Kramersch (1982) believes that L1 culture plays a crucial role in learning L2 culture. She points out that in a foreign culture we construe events by contrast and analogy with our own culture as well as by contrast and analogy with the foreign culture.

Most foreign language teachers agree that sensitizing students to cultural phenomena is urgent and crucial. The learners' attitude to the target culture has an impact upon the acquisition of the language. Prodromou (1978) defines the successful learner as he who holds a

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positive attitude towards a target culture. However, research suggests a positive attitude about a target culture facilitates language acquisition. Robinson (1978)

As pointed earlier, this research project had one important goal. It attempted to investigate Persian learners' attitude towards L1 and L2 culture. To achieve this aim, after administering a proficiency test, 30 homogeneous subjects were selected. The students were further divided into three levels. The results obtained from the questionnaire, testing students' attitudes towards L1 and L2 cultures, were further analyzed. Results revealed that the students' attitudes had ameliorated as their proficiency level developed. This means that the higher the students level, the more positive attitudes they had adopted to their second language. It also proved that the students' positive attitudes to their native language had an important impact on their language attainment.

Considering the scores of the students in the Nelson test, they were chosen to be placed in the advanced group if they had obtained the score between 30-50, intermediate with the score of 15-30 and finally elementary if they had gained the minimum score of 0-15. Subsequently, the results of the answers to the questions related to the attitudes were scored and the mean score of the results was then calculated.

As table1. illustrates the advanced group has notably shown conspicuous positive attitudes towards the target language culture in comparison with those of intermediate and elementary group. Correspondingly, the mean score of the intermediate group in the questionnaire is higher than that of the elementary. It can then be concluded that the more proficient the learners are, the more positive their attitudes to the target language will be.

Table 1. The mean scores of the groups obtained from the questionnaire

Nelson	Questionnaire
Advanced(30-50)	126.88
Intermediate(15-30)	93.9
Elementary(0-15)	83.27

### **The pedagogical implications**

Culture teaching should allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitudes, beliefs and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic categories and forms. Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between L2 teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as Byram (1989; 1994a; 1994b; 1997a; 1997b) and Kramsch (1988; 1993; 1996; 2001). People involved in language teaching have again begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language (Pulverness, 2003). There is no such a thing as human nature independent of culture; studying an L2, in a sense, is trying to figure out the nature of another people. McDevitt (2004).

McKay (2003) contends that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistic and pedagogical. Linguistically, it affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it influences the choice of the language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. For example, while some textbooks provide examples from the target culture, some others use source culture materials.

This study hopes to motivate language teachers to expose their students not only to the language itself, but also to the culture of the language with the use of authentic materials. Teachers must also try to improve students attitudes towards their own and foreign language, as well.

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