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## Appendix

### Original and nativized versions of one of the three cloze passages

#### Original version

*Mr. Marsh was a Senator in the government. One day he was driving to a town to (1) an important speech when he (2) at a small restaurant to (3) some coffee. When he saw that the restaurant had some nice*

*fresh rolls, he asked the waitress for one, and she (4) it. Then he asked for some butter and jam and she (5) a very small serving of butter and a very small jar of jam.*

*"I'd like some more jam, please." Mr. Marsh said.*

*"I'm sorry," she answered, "but we (6) give one serving of butter and one jar of jam with each roll."*

*Mr. Marsh began to get (7). "Do you (8) who I am, young lady?" he said. "I'm the state Senator."*

*"And do you (9) who I am?" the waitress asked.*

*Mr. Marsh was (10) and said, "No."*

*"Well," she answered, "I'm the person who gives out the jars of jam."*

#### Nativized version

*Mr. Tehrani was the manager of a big company. One day he was driving to a town to (1) an important speech when he (2) at a small restaurant to (3) some tea. When he saw that the restaurant had some nice fresh bread, he asked the waiter for one, and he (4) it. Then he asked for some butter and jam and he (5) a very small serving of butter and a very small jar of jam.*

*"I'd like some more jam, please." Mr. Tehrani said.*

*"I'm sorry," he answered, "but we (6) give one serving of butter and one jar of jam with each bread."*

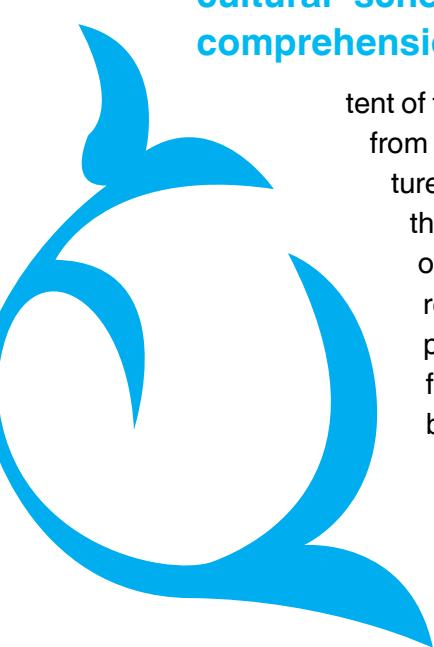
*Mr. Tehrani began to get (7). "Do you (8) who I am, young man?" he said. "I'm the manager of a big company."*

*"And do you (9) who I am?" the waiter asked.*

*Mr. Tehrani was (10) and said, "No."*

*"Well", he answered, "I'm person who gives out the jars of jam."*





pectations, readers may lack the cultural background knowledge which is assumed by the writer, and which is necessary for successful comprehension of the text. Therefore, through nativization of the culture-specific cues in the texts, the influence of cultural schemata can be triggered, and the comprehension can be facilitated.

Generally speaking, target language texts reflect some aspects of the culture of the people for whom they have been originally written. They tend to reflect the preoccupations, the values, beliefs and attitudes of a particular community and typically contain references to people, events, locations, concepts, as well as customs and institutions related to the culture of that community. As far as reading comprehension is concerned, this can be a potential source of reading difficulty for non-native readers because it is often difficult for EFL readers to associate themselves with the characters, events, places, concepts, and con-

**In recent years, as cultural factors receive more emphasis in EFL instruction, considerable attention has been drawn on understanding the role of cultural schemata in reading comprehension**

tent of the anecdotal narratives from the target language culture. Therefore, nativizing these texts to the readers' own culture would help readers activate appropriate schemata more efficiently which results in better comprehension.

Nativization is recom-

mended to EFL teachers and material designers as a new way of text modification to enhance learners' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Using nativized texts in reading classes will have positive import on the development of reading skill. Nativized texts may raise feelings of interest in the readers and increase their motivation to read further and could thus be a good stimulant for extensive reading. Longer narrative texts such as short stories, novellas, and novels can be nativized into learners' own culture and used in extensive reading programs for EFL learners.

Furthermore, nativized texts can create a strong feeling of cultural identity between the reader and the text. This, in turn, may make students more confident readers. Nativized texts may also make it easier to teach basic literary concepts to EFL students of literature. For example, concepts of characterization, conflict, or resolution may be more understandable to students in the more culturally familiar environments of nativized stories rather than in the alien contexts of original American or British stories.

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easily accessed the pragmatic relations between these forms and their referents in the world of experience, and this resulted in their better performance in reading comprehension test. In contrast, the original group lagged behind because they read narratives with surface forms which were culturally unfamiliar (or less familiar) with and which pertained to culturally unfamiliar (or less familiar) content. Therefore, the pragmatic links between these forms and their referents or content were less accessible to them, and their reading comprehension suffered as a result.

The study is also in line with Oller and Chen's (2007) ideas in relation to episod-

### **When reading texts from the target language culture, readers will naturally draw upon information gained from their own cultural experiences and cultural background knowledge**

ic organization in discourse processing measurements. In simple terms, episodic organization refers to a series of episodes in a story-line as in a film or novel and is commonly manifested in the chronological arrangement of narratives and in ordinary reports of event sequences (pp. 127-128). Bringing empirical evidence, Oller and Chen showed that both second language learners and native speakers use episodic organization to fill in missing elements in a cloze task. They further argue that the depth of comprehension of episodic organization is sensitive to relatively minute elements of surface forms and more specifically to the names of persons and places in the dis-

course. That is, changing the surface forms of referring terms in a narrative text to more familiar ones would make them easier for learners to interpret. This is also borne out by this research because the texts contained a number of proper names referring to persons and places which were culturally modified in the nativized versions. This modification probably helped the subjects who read the nativized anecdotes to understand the texts better and thus could solve more cloze items in comparison to the subjects who read the original texts.

### **Conclusion and pedagogical implications**

Comprehension does not occur in a vacuum, and indeed, schemata activation is an important part of the process by which meaning is created by the reader. When reading texts from the target language culture, readers will naturally draw upon information gained from their own cultural experiences and cultural background knowledge. In the case of foreign language reading, where the reader and writer presumably belong to different cultures and have distinct cultural experiences and ex-



readers' background knowledge and textual input function interactively so that a reader's weakness in one area may be compensated for by his strength in another area. In the case of this study, the subjects in the nativized group might have overcome difficult vocabulary and complex grammatical structures and thus inferred the meaning of the unknown words or phrases by drawing on their cultural background knowledge. As a result, they could solve more cloze items in comparison to the original group.

The difference between the two groups'

### **The psychological processes involved in comprehension indicates that people's understanding of language is a function of their past experiences, their background knowledge or what are technically known as their schemata**

performance in comprehension can also be related to the possible interest aroused by culturally nativized texts. When readers see elements of their native culture in the texts, because of the cultural proximity they feel between themselves and the characters, they probably feel much more engaged with the plot and can more strongly identify themselves with the characters of the stories. This, in turn, leads to better understanding of the texts. In addition, research has shown that compared with the first language, the mind is less efficient in a second language at any task, and there is "an L2 cognitive deficit" as it is sometimes called (Cook, 2001, p. 87). It seems that nativizing the texts to conform to the learners' native culture enables learners to compensate for this cognitive deficit and helps them to better connect each sentence with

its subsequent and previous sentences in the text. In fact, the nativized texts put fewer loads on the subjects' memory in comparison to the original ones and results in better text comprehension.

The results of the study can also be interpreted through Oller's (2005) pragmatic or  $\pi$ -bootstrapping hypothesis in language processing and language acquisition. In the history of language teaching, theoreticians and methodologists have generally agreed that it is essential somehow to teach pairings of form, F, with content, C, or FC. Oller, however, maintains that the pragmatic connections between F and C, that is, the  $\pi$ -links ( $F\pi C$ ) is a more complete representation (p. 94). In the formula  $F\pi C$ , F stands for the target language form(s) to be comprehended, or acquired, or both, C stands for the content (i.e., the referent or complex of referents) that may be referred to, and  $\pi$  stands for the particular act that connects F through inference with C that F signifies and to which it purports to refer. Bringing empirical evidence, Oller argues that developing proficiency in any language, or modality, depends on access to the dynamic referential relations between target forms and particular persons, things, events, and relations among them in the world of experience. Citing studies on cultural modifications of reading texts, Oller shows that merely changing the form of certain unfamiliar referring terms in a narrative text to more culturally familiar ones makes form-content relationships more accessible to EFL learners, enhances text coherence, and improves overall comprehension.

As far as this study is concerned, the nativized texts, in both surface forms and their content, were more culturally familiar to the learners. Therefore, the nativized group

students in the control group received the original version of the cloze test and the students in the experimental group received the nativized version. The subjects in both groups were given the same amount of time to complete the cloze passages.

### **Scoring procedure**

The cloze tests were scored according to the acceptable word method. Accordingly, one mark was given to each semantically acceptable answer and zero mark was given to each semantically unacceptable answer. The subjects' grammatical and spelling errors were ignored in the scoring procedure.

### **Results**

After administering the tests and correcting the papers, the collected data were analyzed. Table 4 displays the two groups' performance on the cloze tests.

**Table 4**  
**The Results of the two Groups' Performance on Cloze Test**

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Original	30	11	24	17.16	4.02
Nativized	30	10	27	22.88	3.72

As shown in the table, the mean of the nativized group's scores was greater than the mean of the original group. To see if the difference between the means was statistically significant, an independent t-test was run. The result of this statistical analysis is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
**Independent T-Test Comparing the Means of the two Groups' Scores on Cloze Tests**

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Original	30	17.16	4.02	7.77	58
Nativized	30	22.88	3.72		

As illustrated in the table, the observed

value of  $t$  was much greater than the critical value of  $t$ , indicating that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant and, in fact, nativization of the texts had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension.

### **Discussion**

The results provided an affirmative answer to the research question; that is, nativization of short narrative texts from the target language culture into Persian culture facilitates Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of the texts. Comprehension, according to the schema theory, is an interactive process between the reader and the text, and successful understanding of a text depends crucially on the readers' ability to activate the relevant schemata to relate information from the text to already existing background knowledge. When a person reads a narrative text, the schemata embodying his background knowledge provide the framework for understanding the setting, mood, characters, and the chain of events. When reading the original narratives, the readers might not be able to activate their schemata as efficiently as when they read the nativized version since the original texts are not in line with the EFL readers' cultural background knowledge. So a possible reason for the outperformance of the nativized group is that the nativized narratives are more consistent with Iranian readers' cultural knowledge and thus helped them better activate their schemata regarding the content of the text and enabled them to relate the incidents in the texts to their own background knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, the interactive compensatory model (Stanovich, 2000) suggests that

and rhetorical structures of the texts intact. So this resulted in having two versions of each anecdote – one native English and one nativized.

The narrative texts were nativized in a way that reflected the learners' own culture; that is, they were re-written as if the events were taking place in Iran. Therefore, in the nativized versions all the names of the characters and cities were changed to Iranian names. In addition, a great number of concepts concerning American culture in the original anecdotes were changed in the nativized versions to reflect Persian culture. These concepts were related to cultural elements such as food, jobs, currency, interpersonal relationships, and so on.

In the first anecdote, a *Senator in the government* was changed into the *manager of a big company*, in the nativized version since in the Iranian system of government, there is no Senator; in addition, people do not typically make jokes about high-ranking government officials. As another example, *the waitress* was changed to *the waiter* because in the Iranian culture typically men serve foods and drinks in restaurants not women. Table 2 below shows the textual and contextual cues in the original and nativized versions of the first anecdote.

**Table 1**  
**Textual and Contextual Cues in the two Versions of the First Anecdote**

Original Version	Nativized Version
Mr. Marsh (3 occurrences)	Mr. Tehrani
a Senator in the government	the manager of a big company
coffee	tea
fresh rolls	fresh bread
waitress (2 occurrences)	waiter
each roll	each bread
young lady	young man
she (4 occurrences)	he
the state Senator	the manager of a big company

In the second anecdote, *one of the girls* was changed into *one of the students* in the nativized version since in Iran, boys and girls attend separate classes in separate schools. As another example, when one of the students raises her hand and the teacher says "Yes, *Debbie?*", this was replaced by "Yes, *Karimi?*", in the nativized version, because in the Iranian culture, school teachers usually call their students by their last name in class. Table 3 demonstrates the textual and contextual cues in the original and nativized versions of the second anecdote.

**Table 2**  
**Textual and Contextual Cues in the two Versions of the Second Anecdote**

Original Version	Nativized Version
Miss Rogers (4 occurrences)	Miss Alavi
New York	Tehran
Los Angeles	Istanbul
75 feet	25 meters
one of the girls	one of the students
"Yes, Debbie?"	"Yes, Karimi?"
Debbie	Karimi
eleven o'clock	half past nine

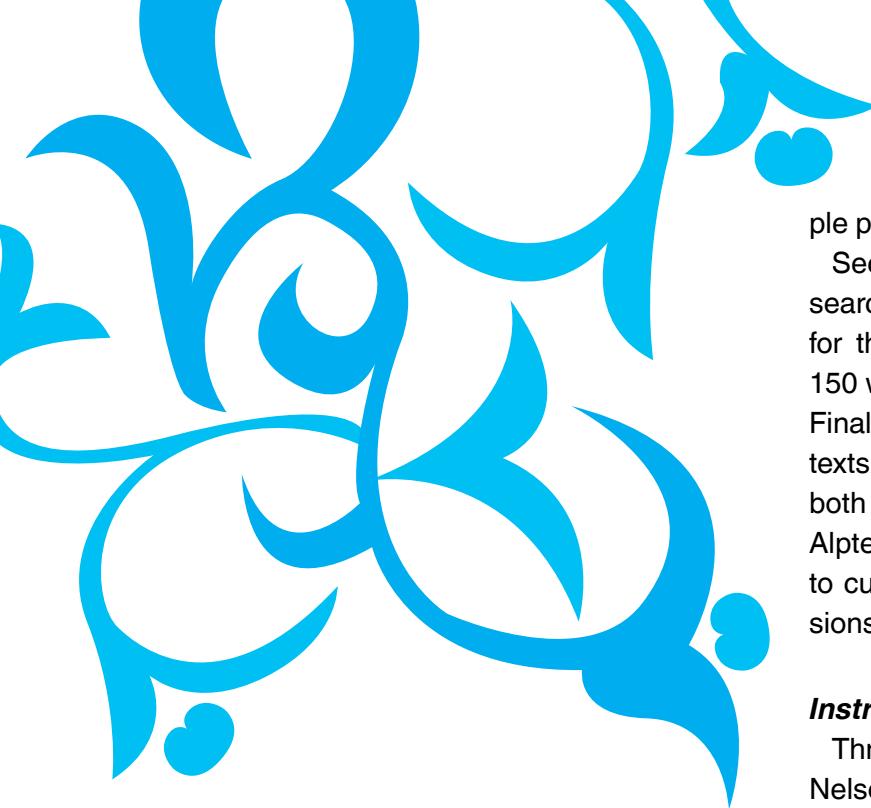
In the third anecdote, *Mrs. Green* was replaced by *Mr. Ahmadi* because in Iran, old women are less likely to travel alone by plane regularly. Table 4 demonstrates other textual and contextual cues in the original and nativized versions of the third anecdote.

**Table 3**  
**Textual and Contextual Cues in the two Versions of the Third Anecdote**

Original Version	Nativized Version
Mrs. Green (4 occurrences)	Mr. Ahmadi
an old lady	an old gentleman
she (6 occurrences)	he
Chicago	Tehran
San Francisco	Ahvaz

### **Administration procedure**

The two versions of the test were administered to the two groups of the subjects participating in the study. Therefore, the



enous sample. Then, they were randomly divided into two groups of 30. One group was considered as the experimental and the other as the control group.

### **Materials**

Three short narrative texts were selected for the study. They were anecdotal narratives in American English taken from Hill (1980). The selection procedure was based on several factors the most important of which were the level of difficulty, the length, and the cultural load of the texts. First, an attempt was made to choose texts at the appropriate level of difficulty in terms of lexical and syntactic complexity for the participants. To accomplish this, the procedure suggested by Farhady, Jafarpur, and Birjandi (2001, p. 283) was followed. That is, Five passages were randomly selected from the first-grade high school students' English textbook. Using Fog's readability formula, the average readability level of the book was determined to be 9.5 with the approximate standard deviation of 1.5. Then, three short narrative texts with readability levels of  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the sam-

ple passages (i.e., 8 to 11) were selected.

Second, in line with the purpose of research, short narrative texts were chosen for the study. The three texts were each 150 words in length, 450 words altogether. Finally, care was exercised to select the texts which contained more cultural cues, both textual and contextual, as defined by Alptekin (2006), and lent themselves well to cultural nativization in the adapted versions.

### **Instruments**

Three tests were utilized in the study: a Nelson English Language Test for selecting homogeneous subjects, and two types of reading comprehension tests developed by the researcher. Both types of reading comprehension tests included three cloze passages. In one type, the cloze texts were based on the original anecdotes, while in the other, they were based on the nativized versions. In each anecdotal narrative, ten words were deleted from the text and students were required to fill in the blanks (See Appendix for the original and nativized versions of one of the cloze passages). Therefore, there were 30 blanks altogether in each cloze test.

### **Procedures**

#### ***Nativization procedure***

The texts selected for the study were nativized into the language learners' own culture (i.e., Persian) based on Alptekin's (2006) definition of cultural nativization. To accomplish this, first, the textual and contextual cues of the anecdotal narratives which reflected American culture were identified, and then these cues were adapted sociologically, semantically, and pragmatically in the modified versions to reflect Persian culture, while keeping linguistic features

quality of comprehension. Concerning content schemata, numerous research studies have demonstrated that a text dealing with a culturally familiar content will be easier to comprehend - all other factors being equal - than a culturally unfamiliar one (Abu-Rabia, 2003; Chihara, Sakurai and Oller, 1989; Carrell, 1987; Droop and Verhoeven, 1998; Pritchard, 1990; Rosowsky, 2000; Sasaki, 2000; Yeut Hung Chan, 2003, among others). This is because the reader is able to activate and utilize the relevant cultural schemata to facilitate comprehension of the culturally familiar text.

The notion of cultural nativization was introduced by Alptekin (2002, as cited in Erten & Razi, 2003) as a way of investigating the effect of cultural background knowledge on comprehension of short stories. Alptekin (2006) elaborated on the issue and gave a comprehensive definition of the term 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). By textual cues Alptekin means data which have to do with settings and locations as well as characters and occupations. Examples of Turkish nativization of textual cues given by Alptekin are changing *New York City* to *Istanbul*, or *organist* to *piano player*. Contextual cues, as defined by Alptekin, include culture-specific customs, rituals, notions, structures, and values (p. 500). An example of nativization of contextual cues is replacing the *traditional American Sunday dinner* by a *Bayram meal* for Turkish learners.

Since the concept of cultural nativization was introduced, few studies have been conducted on the role of this type of text modification in reading comprehension (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razi, 2003, 2009; Jalilifar and

Assi, 2008; Razi, 2004). Previous studies on cultural nativization have generally indicated that nativizing a target language narrative text to conform to the learners' cultural schemata facilitates learners' comprehension of the text. However, these studies have investigated the role of nativization in reading comprehension in relation to only short stories, so other alternatives such as longer or shorter narrative texts have not been researched yet. Furthermore, most of these studies have investigated the issue in Turkish culture and with Turkish EFL learners. As such, the studies need to be replicated and the findings have to be confirmed by other studies with learners from other cultural contexts. Taking these limitations into consideration, this study examined the effect of cultural nativization on comprehension of short narrative texts. More specifically it explored the issue in relation to Persian culture among students learning English as a foreign language. The study was an attempt to answer the following question:

1. Does nativization of short narrative texts from the target language culture into Persian culture affect Iranian EFL learners' comprehension of the texts?

## Methodology

### Participants

The subjects participating in this study were 60 Iranian EFL learners with the average age of fifteen. They were selected from among 100 first-graders in a high school in Ahvaz, based on the scores obtained from a standard proficiency test, that is, a Nelson Test (Fowler and Coe, 1976) consisting of 50 multiple choice items. On the basis of the results obtained from the test, 60 students whose scores fell between one standard deviation above or below the mean score were selected as a homog-

## Introduction

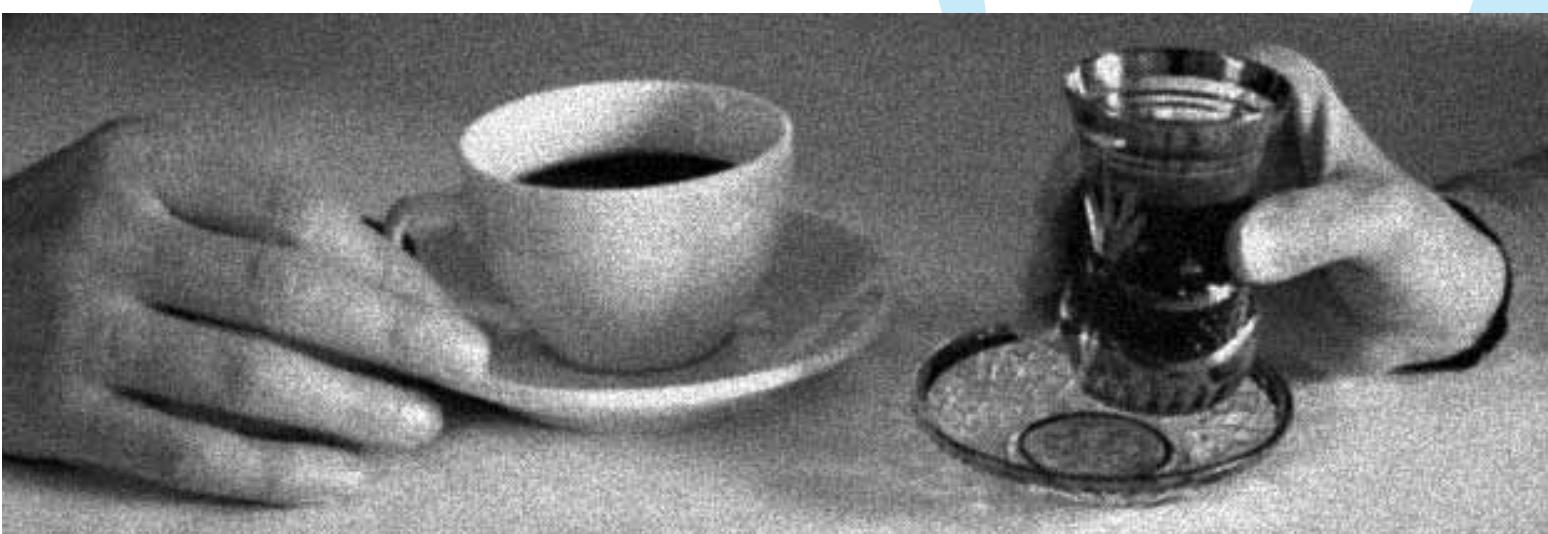
Research on the psychological processes involved in comprehension indicates that people's understanding of language is a function of their past experiences, their background knowledge or what are technically known as their schemata. The role of prior knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized in a theoretical model known as schema theory. One of the basic tenets of this theory is that texts themselves, whether spoken or written, do not carry meaning; rather, they provide signposts or clues for listeners or readers in reconstructing the meanings from their own background knowledge. Reading comprehension is thus an interactive process between the reader and the textual input, in that the reader is required to fit the clues provided in the text to his own previously acquired knowledge (Nunan, 2002).

In schema-theoretic studies, a theoretical distinction is often made between *content* and *formal* schemata. Content schemata are usually understood as the background knowledge about the content area or the subject matter of a text; in contrast, formal schemata are claimed to constitute the background knowledge of the formal rhetorical

structures of different text types or genres (Field, 2004; Villanueva de Debat, 2006).

In recent years, as cultural factors have received more emphasis in EFL instruction, considerable attention has been drawn on understanding the role of cultural schemata in reading comprehension. It is argued that non-native readers' failure to activate appropriate cultural schemata during reading may result in various degrees of non-comprehension. This is because schemata, as Yule (2000) points out, are culturally determined, and people develop their cultural schemata in the context of their basic experiences. In other words, the sociocultural context in which an individual is embedded will affect his/her schemata. It follows that when a person is presented with culturally familiar information, this information will be easier to understand than culturally unfamiliar information, as the former ties in better with the person's cultural schemata.

Cultural schema has been researched in relation to both content and formal schemata, and schema-theoretic studies in both L1 and L2 reading have generally indicated that the more content and/or form of a text interact with the readers' cultural background knowledge, the better the



# Cultural Nativization of Short Narrative Texts and its Impact on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

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## چکیده

این تحقیق به بررسی نقش بومی‌سازی فرهنگی در فهم متون روایی کوتاه زبان مقصد توسط زبان آموزان ایرانی پرداخته است. براساس تعریف الپتکین (۲۰۰۶) از بومی‌سازی فرهنگی، ابتدا سه متن روایی کوتاه انگلیسی آمریکایی براساس فرهنگ فارسی بومی‌سازی شدند. سپس دو نوع آزمون بسته (Cloze) برای سنجش فهم نوشتاری زبان آموزان طراحی شد که یکی از آن‌ها بر اساس متون اصلی و دیگری براساس نسخه‌های بومی شده آن‌ها بود. برای انجام تحقیق، از ۱۰۰ دانش‌آموز سال اول دبیرستان، آزمون استاندارد توانش زبانی (Nelson) به عمل آمد. براساس نمره این آزمون، تعداد ۶۰ نفر از دانش‌آموزان هم سطح از نظر توانش زبانی، انتخاب و بهطور تصادفی به دو گروه ۳۰ نفره تقسیم شدند. برای جمع‌آوری داده‌های موردنظر، هر نسخه آزمون به یک گروه شرکت‌کننده داده شد. نتایج نشان داد که بومی‌سازی فرهنگی تأثیر بسزایی در فهم متون‌ها داشته است. یافته‌های این تحقیق، برای معلمان زبان انگلیسی و طراحان مواد آموزشی پیام‌هایی دارد.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** بومی‌سازی فرهنگی، فرهنگ زبان مقصد، نظریه طرح‌واره، طرح‌واره فرهنگی

## Abstract

This study investigated the role of cultural nativization in the comprehension of the target language short narrative texts by Iranian EFL learners. Following Alptekin's (2006) definition of cultural nativization, three short narrative texts in American English were nativized into Persian culture. Then, two types of cloze tests were constructed to assess reading comprehension: one based on the original texts and the other based on the nativized versions. To conduct the research, a standard language proficiency test (Nelson Test) was administered to 100 first-grade high school students and based on their scores, 60 learners were selected as a homogenous sample. Then, they were randomly divided into two groups of 30. In order to collect the relevant data, each version of the test was administered to one group of the subjects. The results demonstrated that cultural nativization had a facilitative role in comprehension of the texts. The findings of the study bear implications for EFL teachers and material designers.

**Key Words:** cultural nativization, target language culture, schema theory, cultural schemata