The Effect of Text Nativization and Schema-Based Pre-Reading Activities on Reading Comprehension of EFL Students

SiavashRokhsari

Department of English Language and Literature, ShahidBeheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of text nativization and schema-based pre-reading activities including brainstorming and K-W-L (what I Know, what I Want to know, what I Learned) chart on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Four target language texts including two expository and two narrative texts were nativized into Iranian culture following Alptekin's (2006) definition of cultural nativization. Four groups of intermediate EFL learners, including 47 males and 53 females, participated in the study. In a quasi-experimental research design, the first group of students read two expository and two narrative nativized texts with some pre-reading activities. The second group read the same texts without any pre-reading activities. The third group read the 2 expository and 2 narrative texts in their original forms and with the same pre-reading activities. Finally, the fourth group read the same original texts without any pre-reading activities. They then answered true/false and multiple-choice comprehension questions. The statistical analysis indicated a better comprehension of the first and second groups, who received nativized texts. The results clearly demonstrated that cultural nativization has a facilitative effect on comprehension of the texts. However, the pre-reading activities did not significantly contribute to the comprehension of the texts. In short, nativization had a more powerful impact than pre-reading activities on reading comprehension. The findings of the study bear implications for EFL teachers, learners and materials designers.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, Schema theory, Nativization, Pre-reading activities, Brainstorming, K-W-L chart

I.   Introduction

Following the hypothesized enhancive role of input comprehension in the acquisition process, many studies have focused on comprehension of input, including comprehension of written input (AnaniSarab&Karimi, 2008). Reading comprehension is essential particularly to many English as a foreign language learners who rarely have a chance to speak English in their daily lives (Razi, 2010).In recent years, the focus in the study of second language reading comprehension

has shifted from the texts to the interaction between the texts and readers (Ajideh, 2003). In accordance with this switch of attention, content and cultural elements of the texts have begun to be viewed as important as, if not more important than, the linguistic units.

II.   Reading Comprehension and Cultural Schema

In their attempt to examine fundamental factors influencing reading comprehension, many researchers found that that prior knowledge plays a vital role in reading comprehension (Dochy et al., 1999; Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Shapiro, 2004; Samuelstuen&Braeten, 2005; Rapp et al., 2007; Hailikari et al.,2008). The effective role of prior knowledge has been largely appreciated through schema-theoretic model of comprehension which claims no text by itself carries meaning (Jalilifar&Assi, 2008). Schema theory is based on the idea that past experiences result in a mental frameworks to understand new experiences (Nunan, 1999). The type of schema which has more to do with current study is cultural schema. Cultural schema is a culture-specific extension of content schema as it sheds light on the role of cultural familiarity in the process of reading comprehension (Ketchum, 2006). The interwoven relation of language and culture has enjoyed widespread theoretical and experimental support (Ando, 1997; Harumi, 2002; Eoyang, 2003; Tanaka, 2006; Janzen, 2008; Tochon, 2009). Beginning with Bartlett's classical study (1932), a large body of research has endorsed the positive effect of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension (Reynold, et. al, 1982; Steffensen and Joag-Dev, 1984; Hewett, 1985; Carrell, 1987; Nelson, 1987; Sasaki et al., 1991; Rosowsky, 2000; Brantmeier, 2003; Chan, 2003; Pulido, 2004; Kreishan and Saidat, 2011).

III.   Text Modification

Recent studies on the issue of cultural familiarity have focused on text modification and using culturally familiar words to replace the unfamiliar ones (Chihara et al., 1989; Al-Fallay, 1994; Sasaki, 2000; Razi, 2004; Jalilifar&Assi, 2008; Erten&Razi; 2009).Alptekin (2006) has defined

nativization 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). The findings of these studies supported the facilitative role of nativization in reading process. It has been argued that the growing number of non-native speakers of English made it undesirable and unnecessary for some EFL learners to learn the culture of native speakers (McKay, 2003). As such, nativization can be introduced as a promising technique to help learners who are learning English as a denationalized language (Alptekin, 1981) or for special purposes. Nativization process can also be used for the younger learners who have not acquired enough world knowledge to understand original texts. It can be further recommended to the elementary readers who are not proficient enough to make up for the lack of cultural familiarity through bottom-up reading

IV. Pre-reading Activities

Reading activities have been suggested as devices to support the reader's interpretation of text and to prevent any possible failure in reading process (Karakas, 2002). Almost all recent dichotomies of reading activities involve the three stages of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading (Alyousef, 2006; Ur, 1996; Williams, 1987); however, there is a general agreement that of these, the most significant for building and activating background knowledge is the first, pre-reading phase. Ringler and Weber (1984) believe that pre-reading activities elicit prior knowledge, provide background, and focus attention. Ajideh (2006) maintains that pre-reading activities can be helpful in three ways: by building new schemata, by activating existing schemata, and by informing the teacher what the students know. Several studied aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the major types of pre-reading activities. Karakas (2005), for example, showed that a combination of previewing and brainstorming is more effective than purely using brainstorming with reading comprehension. Chen and Graves (1995) examined the efficiency of previewing and providing background knowledge and concluded that previewing is more effective than providing background knowledge. Shen (2004) found that providing

background knowledge is the most effective one. Erten and Karakas (2007) reported that some activities contributed to the literal comprehension, while others contributed better to the evaluative comprehension of short stories.

One very popular kind of pre-reading task is brainstorming (Wallace, 2001). In this type of pre-reading, learners receive a key word and are asked to call out words and concepts they associate with. In this whole class activity learners are given a valuable opportunity to bring their own prior knowledge and ideas about a particular issue and at the same time activate their related schema (Ajideh, 2003). Ogle's (1986) designed K-W-L chart to help students activate their prior knowledge. In the first column of this chart, the students write what they already know about a subject, in the second column students indicate what they want to know about the subject, and the students complete the third column after reading about the subject by writing answers to the questions that they asked in the second column.

The need for reducing the inhibiting effects of target culture on reading comprehension can be greatest for the students of English as a foreign language (EFL) who are deprived of exposure to the target culture and particularly for non-West and non-Christian EFL students whose culture is largely different and even in sharp contrast with that of their English reading materials.

Employing nativization allowed the researcher to minimize possible intervening variables such as syntactical, lexical, and rhetorical difference of texts and to leave culturally neutral elements intact. The current study has also extended the modification process to include textual and contextual elements of the texts and a replacement of accompanying original pictures with the locally familiar ones. The present study provides a wider empirical scope on the role of nativization in reading comprehension by nativizing four reading text including two narrative and two expository texts.

The current study not only sheds lights on the role of cultural familiarity in reading comprehension, but at the same time explores the role of pre-reading activities in compensating the lack of cultural familiarity. The nativization process makes it easier to measure how effective the use of pre-reading activities is in making up for the lack of relevant cultural schema.

This study focuses its primary purpose on how to improve English reading comprehension of Iranian EFL students by means of identifying the role of cultural schema and by investigating the remedial role of selected pre-reading activities in reading comprehension. This study aims to explore the effects of both nativization and pre-reading activities on the comprehension of expository and narrative texts by Iranian learners learning English as a foreign language.

The specific research questions and hypothesesof this study are as follows:

1. Does cultural familiarity through nativization of texts significantly improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

2. Does cultural familiarity through pre-reading activities significantly improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

3. Is there a difference between nativization of texts and pre-reading activities in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

H 1: Cultural familiarity through nativization of texts significantly improves learners' reading comprehension.

H 2: Cultural familiarity through pre-reading activities significantly improves learners' reading comprehension.

H 3: There is a significant difference between nativiszation of texts and pre-reading activities in terms of their effect on the learners' level of reading comprehension.

V.   **Methodology**

A. Participants

The participants of this study were 100 male and female students at intermediate level and their age ranged from 14 to 17. Four coeducational intact classes from Tolou-e-Sabz (Oxford) and Marefat English Language Institutes in Qaemshar (a city in Mazandaran in the North of Iran) formed the four groups of this study. At the time of data collection, they had studied English for 4–6 school years and 6-7 terms in language institutes. The pilot study included 40 students from Oxford Institute. They were at the same level and age range of those students who later participated in the main study. Through the method described by Moore and McCabe (1999) two students with outlier results on Oxford Quick placement test were eliminated before conducting the study.

The result of an early placement test also supported the assumption that they were at the same level of English language proficiency (See Table 1). The one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences among the treatment groups ($p > .05$) (See Table 2).

TABLE I
MEAN SCORES FOR EACH TREATMENT GROUP ON THE PLACEMENT TEST

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NWP	25	38.28	2.66
NNP	25	39.52	3.58
OWP	25	37.28	4.28
ONP	25	38.04	3.58
Total	100	38.28	3.61

Note: NWA= Nativized With Pre-reading; NNP= Nativized
with No Pre-reading; OWP= Original With Pre-reading; ONP=
Original with No Pre-reading

TABLE II
ONE-WAY ANOVA FOR PLACEMENT TEST'S RESULTS

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	64.880	3	21.627	1.689	.175
Within Groups	1229.280	96	12.805		
Total	1294.160	99			

B. Materials and Instruments

Language Proficiency Test

Quick placement test (QPT) version II, which is a paper and pencil test developed by Oxford University (2001) was conducted before the main reading session to assess the participants' knowledge of English based on the number of correct answers.

Reading Texts and Nativization

Two expository texts and two narrative texts were chosen and nativized for research purposes in a way that they could reflect Iranian culture. Nativization functioned as an independent variable and provided a context that the participants were culturally familiar with. In the nativization process, all culturally unfamiliar textual and contextual elements including pictures were changed to familiar ones, so that they would make sense to Iranian readers and activate their schemata about the Iranian culture. Table 3 shows samples of nativized element in 4 passages of this study.

TABLE III
SAMPLE OF ORIGINAL AND NATIVIZED ELEMENTS OF TEXTS

Original	Nativized
July 4--Independence Day	Muharram 10, Ashura Day
Jeffrey	Reza
the parade	Dasteh
take the dog for a walk	buy a loaf of bread
two miles	one kilometer
Main Street	Valiasr Street
the baseball game	the Soccer game
New York Yankees fan	Perspolis fan
big bucks	thousands of Tomans
Church	Mosque
Black Friday	Norouz shopping Days
Red Cross	Red Crescent
Santa Claus	Haji Firooz
California jury	Iran's army
a U.S. citizen	an Iranian citizen

These texts were chosen from an online collection of reading materials for intermediate EFL/ESL learners ("365 ESL short stories," 2011). Two independent language experts read the original and nativized passages and verified that these passages were cohesive before and after nativization. Table 4 shows the titles of original and nativized versions of the expository and narrative texts used in this study.

TABLE IV
WORD STATISTICS OF ORIGINAL AND NATIVIZED TEXTS

Expository	**A**	Original	Black Friday
	B	Nativized	Norouz Shopping Days
	C	Original	Jury Service in California
	D	Nativized	Military Service in Iran
Narrative	**E**	Original	Independence Day Parade
	F	Nativized	Ashoora Day Dasteh
	G	Original	The baseball game
	H	Nativized	The Soccer game

As illustrated in figure 1, the outcome of Fry's Extended graph indicated that the readability of passages was appropriate for the proficiency level of the learners. It also showed that the nativization process had almost no effect on readability of the passages.
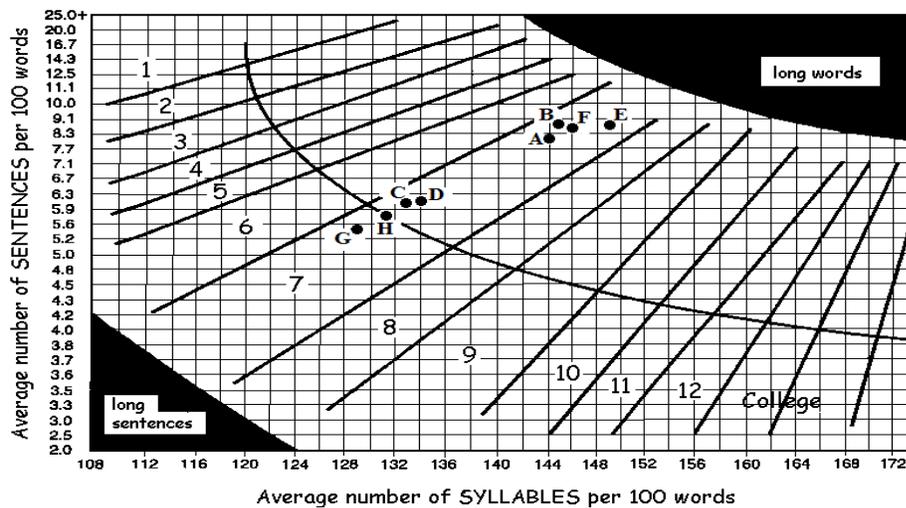
Figure. 1. Fry's Extendedgraph for estimating grade level

Posttest

Each text was followed by 5 true/ false and 5 multiple choice items. The results of pilot test were used to modify items which were inappropriate in terms of item difficulty (less than 0.3 or more

than 0.6), item distribution (less than 0.4) and choice distribution. The results of Split-half method and Spearman Brown prophecy provided an acceptable level of reliability for both original (r: .840) and nativized (r: .864) versions of the test.

Pre-reading Activities

Two pre-reading activities were chosen to be used with only two groups: the OWP group and the NWP group. This study did not aim to compare the effectiveness of different pre-reading activities. Rather, it intended to compare the differences in the participants' comprehension with or without pre-reading activities. This study focused on two pre-reading activities, brainstorming and K-W-L chart. The researcher wrote the title of the passages on the board and asked the students to call out any relevant word and wrote them on the board. When participants had difficulty in coming up with related words, the teacher used more general terms, instead. The teacher explained to the students that the first column should be a list of what they already know about the subject. Then, the researcher instructed the students to write questions that they wanted to get the answer from the text in the middle column of their K-W-L chart. The participants were told to fill the third column after reading the text. For the third part of the K-W-L the participants were told just to check if they got the answer to their questions or not.

C. *Procedure*

The passages were presented to all groups in two consecutive sessions, and the order of the presentation of the passages was the same for the four groups. The first group of participants (NWP) received 2 nativized texts (one expository and one narrative) along with pre-reading activities. The second group (NNP) had 2 nativized texts (one expository and one narrative) and no pre-reading activity in each session. The third group (OWP) read the original text (one expository and one narrative) and also received pre-reading in each session. Finally, the last

group (ONP) read 2 original texts (one expository and one narrative) in each session with no pre-reading. Time allocation was based on time estimation in the pilot study. Those who received pre-reading activities were given 5 minutes more as they were required to fill the third column of the K-W-L chart.

D. *Design*

This study was a non-randomized subjects, posttest only, which is a quasi-experimental type of research. The effect of independent variables which were the nativization of texts and pre-reading activities including brainstorming and K-W-L on the dependent variable which was learners' reading comprehension was investigated through a posttest.

E. *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics – mean and standard deviation – were calculated to find the difference among the results of four groups. Then, the participants' posttest scores were analyzed by using one way ANOVA to find a significance difference at the generally accepted alpha level (p-value) of 0.05. A post-hoc Scheffe test was also employed to find out where the group differences occurred. Finally, Cohen's d was used to calculate the effect size between groups and to indicate how big or small a significant difference was.

VI. **Results and analysis**

Table 5 demonstrates the mean scores gained by the four groups in the study. As Table 5 indicates and Figure 2 demonstrates, substantial differences existed between the groups' performances.

TABLE V
MEAN SCORES OF GROUPS

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NWP	25	33.0400	4.86038
NNP	25	31.7200	3.69143
OWP	25	27.8000	3.05505
ONP	25	25.1200	3.43171
Total	100	29.4200	4.91171

Note. NWP = Nativized text with pre-reading; NNP = Nativized text with no Pre-reading; OWP = Original text With Pre-reading; ONP = Original text with No Pre-reading.
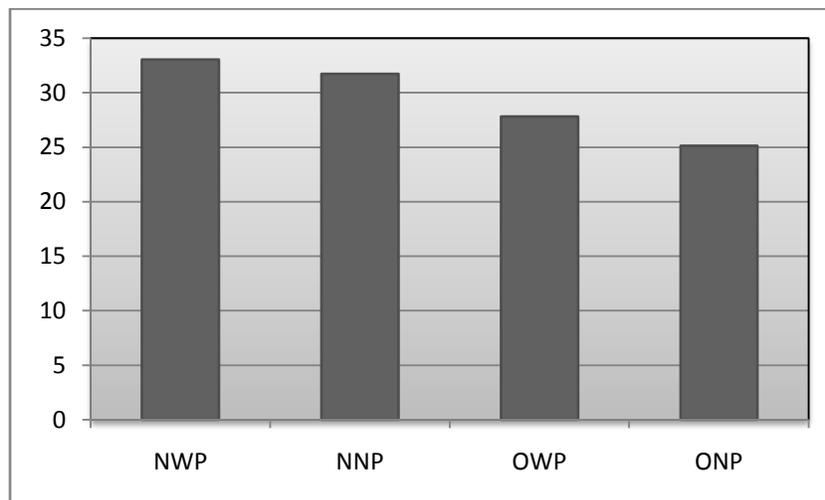
Figure.2. Post-test meanscores of groups

The two groups that received the nativized versions of the text scored higher than the other two groups, with the NWP group being the most successful. The participants who read the nativizedreading texts without pre-reading activities scored higher than those who read the original reading texts both with and without reading activities.

The results of one-way ANOVA test, presented in Table 6, indicated statistically significant differences between some groups at the $F(3, 96) = 22.56, p=.000$

TABLE VI
ONE- WAY ANOVA TEST RESULTS

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Post- Test Scores	Between Groups	987.720	3	329.240	22.566	.000
	Within Groups	1400.640	96	14.590		
	Total	2388.360	99			

Group differences were examined in more details through post-hoc Scheffe test and Cohen's d. The results are illustrated in Table 7 and 8.

TABLE VII
POST HOC SCHEFFE TEST FOR THE TOTAL SCORES

Dependent Variable	(I) Treatment	(J) Treatment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Total	NWP	NNP	1.32000	1.08037	.685
		OWP	5.24000[*]	1.08037	.000
		ONP	7.92000[*]	1.08037	.000
	NNP	NWP	-1.32000	1.08037	.685
		OWP	3.92000[*]	1.08037	.006
		ONP	6.60000[*]	1.08037	.000
	OWP	NWP	-5.24000[*]	1.08037	.000
		NNP	-3.92000[*]	1.08037	.006
		ONP	2.68000	1.08037	.112
	ONP	NWP	-7.92000[*]	1.08037	.000
		NNP	-6.60000[*]	1.08037	.000
		OWP	-2.68000	1.08037	.112

Note. NWP = Nativized text with pre-reading; NNP = Nativized text with no Pre-reading; OWP = Original text With Pre-reading; ONP = Original text with No Pre-reading.

TABLE VIII
COHEN'S D EFFECT SIZE FOR THE TOTAL SCORES

Treatment A	Treatment B	Cohen's d
NWP	NNP	0.30
	OWP	1.29
	ONP	1.88
NNP	OWP	0.15
	ONP	1.082
OWP	ONP	0.82

Note. NWP = Nativized text with pre-reading; NNP = Nativized text with no Pre-reading; OWP = Original text With Pre-reading; ONP = Original text with No Pre-reading.

A. Investigating Research Question and Hypothesis1

Regarding the first research question, the researcher intended to investigate the effect of nativization on learners' reading comprehension. The above mentioned statistical computations were used to analyze the difference between those groups who received the original text and those who received the nativized versions (NNP vs. ONP and NWP vs. OWP). The first research question of this study received a positive response andthe first hypothesis was strongly supported by the between-group differences, which confirmed that cultural familiarity through nativization did improved the students' comprehension. The NNP group outperformed (M = 31.72) the ONP group (M = 25.12), with a considerable effect size (d = 1.08) at $p <$ .05 (p = .00). The second pairing yielded even bigger differences: The NWP students (M = 33.04) did significantly better (p =.000) than the OWP students (M = 27.80), indicating a large effect size (d = 1.29).

The findings supported the first hypothesis by viewing cultural back ground knowledge as an important part of reading comprehension process. The findings provided affirmative answers to the first research question by viewing cultural background knowledge as an important part of reading comprehension process. The results of this study supported the fact that nativization of original texts into Persian culture facilitates Iranian EFL learners' comprehension. this study produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field

which investigated the role of cultural background knowledge or cultural schemata in reading comprehension The results are also in tune with the findings of the studies on the relationship between cultural modification of texts and reading comprehension which have shown that adapting texts to conform to the learners' cultural expectations makes them more comprehensible to the readers.

One explanation for this superiority could be that the contextual and textual familiar elements helped readers to recreate the writer's message through the activation of the relevant schema which, in turn, leads to richer and better comprehension. The settings in nativized texts are more compatible with Iranian readers' expectations as they take place somewhere in their own country. For example, an Iranian reader has a general idea of what the Vali-Asr Street might look like; as opposed to Main Street. Similarly, readers' conceptions of the characters in the narrative texts are more consistent with their cultural schemata. For example Reza, in the nativized version is more consistent with readers' cultural schemata than is Jeffery in the original version. In the context of Iran, it is difficult for readers to conceive of a boy to take a dog for a walk as a chore, but it is easier to imagine a boy buying a loaf of bread.

The effective result of nativization can be partly explained by the nativized familiar pictures. On the other hand, the pictures of the original texts seemed to be misleading and posed extra ambiguity to be dissolved by the readers. The unfamiliar pictures, integrated with the original texts actually may have increased the perceptual (therefore cognitive) load of the readers' working memory and further hampered the reading comprehension process (C. Alptekin, personal communication, November 27, 2011). However, the locally familiar pictures could help readers employ such metacognitive strategies as visualizing to enhance their comprehension (S. Razi, personal communication, December 4, 2011). The familiar illustrations could also provide a "multidimensional representation" of the texts in readers' mind and improve their comprehension (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 352).

It seems possible that the higher self-confidence of those who read the nativized texts lead to their better comprehension. Those who read the nativized text were more willing to take risk and use their relevant schema to make inference (Kern, 1988). When the readers' cultural schema

matches the cultural information of the text, they will feel more secure to rely on their background knowledge and top-down processes to understand the text. Those who read the original texts took very timid steps and could hardly go beyond the literal meaning and inevitably had poor comprehension.

Nativization enables readers to relate the items and situations of a text to their own existing information, and this in turn will improve their reading comprehension (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Nassaji, 2002).

The results of the present study are also supported by Stanovich's (1980) interactive compensatory model. Accordingly, the nativized group who read the nativized texts could make up for their bottom-up linguistic deficiencies by relying on their background knowledge and top-down processes.

The positive effect of nativization is also supported by Ausubel's (1960) subsumption theory. According to him, to understand the new information, it is essential that the students make connections between the new material and their own personal experience. Nativization of text provides necessary background knowledge upon which new concepts can be subsumed.

The reported superiority of nativized groups can also be attributed to the fact that the readers who read the nativized texts could analyze many culturally familiar terms in an automatic process (Erten, 1998; McLaughlin, 1987). It has also been suggested that dealing with already familiar contexts can free up some cognitive load (Ellis, 2001; Nassaji, 2002) and spare more valuable attentional space for analysis and interpretation of more unfamiliar and newer elements in the text.

The enhancive effect of nativization and cultural familiarity may also be the result of motivational issues. As such, the students in the nativized group might have benefited from the situational interest (Alexander & Jetton, 2000) provided by the familiar text. Tomlinson (1998) argued that students will be more willing to identify themselves with the context of culturally familiar texts. Arguably, the appeal of nativized texts might have contributed to higher levels of motivation and thus led to a better reading comprehension.

B. Investigating Research Question and Hypothesis 2

The second research question deals with the role of prereading activities in providing cultural familiarity and improving reading comprehension. A comparison of the results of the groups that received prereading activities and those who didn't (NNP vs. NWP and ONP vs. OWP) provided the key. The second research question did not receive an affirmative answer and the second hypothesis was not supported by the results obtained from the cross-comparisons between the groups. The NWP students (M = 33.04) did not significantly outperformed the NNP students (M = 31.72) at $p > .05$ (.68), showing the insignificant effects of pre-reading activities on reading comprehension. The difference between the OWP and ONP students was not statistically significant ($p = .112$), implying that the activities could not compensate the lack of cultural familiarity.

As for the second research question, the results of study failed to provide a strong evidence for using pre-reading activities to compensate for the lack of cultural familiarity and the second hypothesis was rejected. In fact, the pre-reading activities did not contribute significantly to comprehension. OWP group's comprehension was not significantly better than that of the ONP group. The pre-reading activities also failed to create a meaningful difference between NNP and NWP. In contrast to earlier findings (Alemi and Ebadi, 2010; Chen and Graves, 1995; Erten and Karakas, 2007; Karakas, 2005; Little & Box, 2011; Shen, 2004; Strangman& Hall, 2004; Zhaohua, 2004) the results of this study failed to assign a supportive role to pre-reading activities. No evidence for the significant role of pre-reading activities in providing cultural familiarity was detected. Similarly, Razi (2004) found that reading activities including pre-reading activities could not make a significant difference between those who read the nativized or between those who read original stories. It seems that, not only the pre-reading activities failed to activate the learners' schema; they also failed to play other roles ascribed to them in the literature. It may be that all those assumed and even empirically supported beneficial roles of pre-reading activities are bound with the notion of cultural familiarity.

It is also possible that the types of pre-reading activities used in this study were not adequate in compensating for the gaps in cultural familiarity between the two groups. This rather unexpected result may also be due to learners' unfamiliarity with the type of pre-reading activities used in the study. Another possible explanation is that the gaps in learners' cultural knowledge were so big that the use of pre-reading activities did not make much difference in providing or activating the necessary schema.

C. Investigating Research Question and Hypothesis 3

The third research question intended to compare prereading activities and nativization in terms of improving reading comprehension. Similar procedures were followed to answer the third question. This time the focus of attention was on the difference between the group that received nativized version with no prereading and the group that received prereading activities for the original texts. (NNP vs. OWP).The results of this study provided an affirmative answer to the third research question and the third hypothesis was clearly confirmed as text nativization had a significantly better result on reading comprehension. There was a significant difference between the OWP students and the NNP students (d = 0.15, p =.006). The students who read the original text with some activities (M = 27.80) did much worse than the students who read the nativized texts with no activities (M = 31.72).

The results provided a positive answer to the third research question and supported the third hypothesis, as the groups who received the nativized texts (NNP) performed considerably better than the one that received pre-reading activities (OWP). As such, the assumption that pre-reading activities can somewhat compensate for the lack of cultural familiarity reading comprehension is not borne out by the results of this research. Erten and Razi (2009) and Razi (2004) found different results. In their study no significant difference was observed between those who read the nativized text without reading activities and those who read the original text with reading

activities. They have also included while-reading and postreading activities in their studies. Apart from that, these contrasting results may be due to difference in the native culture. The effectiveness of nativization may vary from a culture to another culture. Needless to say, nativization will lead to significantly better results when employed in the contexts in which there is a larger gap between the native and target culture. Moreover, they studied the effect of nativization on one narrative text. In an attempt to achieve more reliable and generalizable results, two expository and two narrative texts were nativized in the current study.

VII.   **Conclusion**

   A. Conclusion

According to the results of the study, cultural familiarization through nativization has a facilitative effect on reading comprehension. Pre-reading activities may have an impact on reading comprehension, but they can hardly make up for the lack of cultural familiarity when readers' schemata do not match the writer's. In short, nativizing the text plays a more enhancive role than providing readers with pre-reading activities.

   B. Implications

The findings of this study have implications for textbook writers to incorporate target culture knowledge in such a way that allow learners to gradually build up the necessary cultural knowledge. They should take care not to overwhelm learners with the type of texts that demand comprehensive knowledge of target culture.

The significant effect of nativization on reading comprehension shows the great potentials of teaching target culture in improving learners' reading comprehension. Regarding the highly facilitative role of cultural familiarity, it seems more advisable to include cultural teaching as "an

integral and organized part of the course content" (Chastain, 1988, p. 298) rather than relying on pre-reading activities to do the job.

Teachers must be sensitive to potential comprehension difficulties which ESL/EFL readers may encounter with a text due to lack of familiarity with the culture-specific content the text presumes. This study will remind them to be more sensitive to their students' reading problems regarding the lack of cultural background knowledge. These issues take special relevance when teachers confront students with apparently good grasp of grammar but still showing difficulty in understanding of a foreign text. Language teacher should have a sound knowledge of target culture and preferably have the experience of living in the context of target culture.

As noted before, pre-reading activities failed to make up for the lack of cultural familiarity. Teacher should be careful not to blindly rely on pre-reading activities and follow the popular belief that providing students with these activities will definitely solve the problem of cultural unfamiliarity. Teachers should adopt a more eclectic approach in their attempt to provide background knowledge and employ other sources of cultural familiarity such as narrow and extended reading.

The results of this study provide insight into the nature of reading and the importance of cultural background. Readers should approach a reading text with a right attitude. They should be informed about the facilitative role of their schema and their own contribution to the meaning of text so as not to get stuck in a bit by bit decoding process. Learners should also appreciate the fact that adding to their knowledge of target culture through available sources is a great way to improve their L2 reading comprehension.

C. Limitations

A number of features of the current work limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the obtained results. The first limitation is that the study took place in only one language institutes and with 50 Iranian EFL students. A larger sample with more diversity would have benefited the results.

It should be mentioned that cultural background knowledge is one of the many variables that contribute to reading comprehension. Such variables as attitude, interest, motivation, purpose, gender, and age were not taken into account in this study. Accordingly, the findings of this study may not be a true reflection of the effects of research variables.

In selecting texts for the study, an attempt was made to choose text with more cultural elements that lent themselves to nativization. Such obsession in choosing text may have resulted in choosing texts which were not good representatives of original reading texts. These four passages may not be good samples of all culturally unfamiliar passages. Other passages dealing with other cultural aspects may result in different outcomes.

The pre-reading activities mentioned in the study are limited to brainstorming and K-W-L. Using other pre-reading activities may bring about different results. It is acknowledged that participants of this study may not be cases of extreme cultural isolation. A certain amount of target cultural familiarity due to environmental and media exposure might have contaminated the results of this study.

D. Suggestions for Further Research

This study raises several additional questions for future research.

1. Further research could be done to compare the effect of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension of male and female participants.
2. Another possible improvement to this study can be studying the role of cultural familiarity across different levels of language proficiency.
3. The role of cultural familiarity can be further explored by studying its effect on listening, speaking, and writing in English.
4. This study focused on the implication of cultural schema in reading comprehension of Iranian participants. This study can be replicated in other cultural contexts with the readers of different cultural background.

5. In future investigations it might be possible to investigate the effect of other types of schema on reading comprehension.

6. This study has assumed that the four original texts were culturally unfamiliar to readers. Other studies may be needed to empirically investigate the readers' familiarity of the text (as advocated by Spyridakis and Wenger, 1991) before investigating the effect of nativization activities on reading comprehension.

7. One of the subjects that remains to be explored is that which language is more effective for presenting pre-reading: the target language or the native language

8. The medium of presenting pre-reading activities can also be further studied.

9. Only two pre-reading strategies were studied in the present research. More research is needed to see whether other pre-reading activities can help readers in reading culturally unfamiliar texts.

References

Ajideh, P. (2003). Schema theory-based pre-reading tasks: a neglected essential in the ESL reading class. *The Reading Matrix*, *3*(1), 1-14.

Ajideh, P. (2006). Schema–theory based considerations on pre-reading activities in ESP textbooks. *The Asian EFL Journal*, *16*, 1-19.

Alemi, M., &Ebadi, S. (2010).The effect of pre-reading activities on ESP reading comprehension.*Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(5), 570, 571.

Alexander, P. A., & Jetton, T. (2000). Learning from text: A multidimensional and developmental perspective. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*, Vol. 3 (pp. 285–310). Mahwah, NJ: Earlbaum.

Al-Fallay, I. (1994). *Limiting bias in the assessment of English as a foreign language: The impact of background knowledge on the proficiency of Saudi Arabian students learning English as a foreign language* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Alptekin, C. (1981). Sociopsychological and pedagogic considerations in L2 acquisition.*TESOL Quarterly*, *15*(3), 275-284.

Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading.*System*, *34*, 494–508.

Alyousef, H. S. (2006). Teaching reading comprehension to ESL/EFL learners.*Journal of Language and Learning*, *4*(1), 63-73.

AnaniSarab, M. R., &Karimi, M. (2008).The impact of simplified and interactionally modified input on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.*Human Science*s, *56*, 29-42.

Ando, K. (1997). Language and culture: Motivation of learning Japanese for the students who are in multicultural environment. *Journal of Future Studies*, *2*(1), 69-76.

Ausubel, D. P. (1960). The use of advance orgenizers in the learning and retention of meaningful verbal behavior. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *51*, 267-272.

Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brantmeier, C. (2003). Does gender make a difference? Passage content and comprehension in second language reading.*Reading in a Foreign Language*, *15*(1), 1-27.

Carrell, P. L. (1987).Content and formal schemata in ESL reading.*TESOL Quarterly,21*, 461–481.

Chan, C. (2003). Cultural content and reading proficiency: A comparison of mainland Chinese and Hong Kong learners of English. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *16*(1), 60-69.

Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing second language skills: Theory to practice*. (3rd ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publisher.

Chen, H., & Graves, M. (1995).Effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on Taiwanese college students' comprehension of American short stories.*TESOL Quarterly,29* (4), 663-86.

Chihara, T., Sakurai, T., &Oller J. W. (1989).Background and culture as factors in EFL reading comprehension.*Language Testing*, *6*(2), 143-151.

Dochy, F., Segers, M., &Buehl, M. (1999). The relation between assessment practices and outcomes of studies: The case of research on prior knowledge. *Review of Educational Research*, *69*(2), 145−186.

Ellis, N. C. (2001). Memory for language.In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language* instruction (pp. 33−68). Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Eoyang, E. (2003). Teaching English as Culture: Paradigm shifts in postcolonial discourse. *Diogenes*, *50*(2), 3–16.

Erten, I. H. (1988).*Vocabulary learning strategies: an investigation into the effect of perceptual learning styles and modality of word presentation on the use of vocabulary learning strategies* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, Exter.

Erten, I. H., & Karakas, M. (2007).Understanding the divergent influences of reading activities on the comprehension of short stories.*The Reading Matrix*, *7* (3), 113–133.

Erten, I. H., &Razi, S. (2009). The effect of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension.*Reading in a Foreign Language*, *21*(1), 60-77.

Grabe, W &Stoller, L. F. (2002).*Teaching and researching reading*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Hailikari, T., Katajavuori, N., &Lindblom-Ylanne, S. (2008). The relevance of prior knowledge in learning and instructional design.*American Journal of PharmaceuticalEducation*, *72*(5), 1−8.

Harumi, I. (2002). A new Framework of culture teaching for teaching English as a global language.*RELC Journal*, *33*(2), 36-57.

Hewett, N. M. (1985). Reading, cognitive style, and culture: A look at some relationships in second language acquisition. In A. Labarca & L. M. Bailey (Eds.), *Issues in L2: Theory as practice/ practice as theory* (pp. 62-87). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jalilifar, A. R., &Assi, R. (2008).The role of cultural nativization in comprehension of short stories in EFL reading contexts.*Language, Society, and Culture*, *26, * 62-79.

Janzen, J. (2008). Teaching English language learners in the content areas.*Review of Educational Research*, *78* (2), 1010-1038.

Karakas, M. (2002).*The effects of reading activities on ELT trainee teachers' comprehension of short stories*.(Unpublished master's thesis).CanakkaleOnsekiz Mart University, Canakkale.

Karakas, M. (2005).The effects of pre-reading activities on ELT trainee teachers' comprehension of short stories.*Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, *1*, 25–35.

Kern, R. G. (1988). Foreign language reading: Linguistics, cognitive, and affective factors which influence comprehension. In T. B. Fryer, & F. W. Medley (Eds.), New Challenges and Opportunities. Dimension: Languages '87 (pp. 49-61), Columbia, SC: Southern Conference on Language Teaching.

Kreishan, A. K., &Saidat, M. A. (2011).The effect of the religious and culturalschemata on Jordanian students' comprehensionof English texts.*International Journal of Academic Research*, *3*(4), 339-347.

McKay, S. L. (2003). The cultural basis of teaching English as an international language.*TESOL Matters*, *13*(4), 1, 4.

McLaughlin, B. (1987). *Theories of second language learning*. London: Edward Arnold

Moore, D. S. & McCabe G. P. (1999). *Introduction to the practice of statistics* (3rd ed.) New York: Freeman.

Nassaji, H. (2002). Schema theory and knowledge-based processes in second language reading comprehension: A need for alternative perspectives. *Language Learning*, 52, 439–481.

Nelson, G. L. (1987). Culture's role in reading comprehension: a schema theoretical approach. *Journal of Reading*, *30*, 424-429.

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Outlier calculator. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.miniwebtool.com/outlier-calculator/

Oxford University (2001).Quick placement test version II, paper and pen. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pulido, D. (2004). The relationship between text comprehension and second language incidental vocabulary acquisition: A matter of topic familiarity? *Language Learning*, *54*(3), 469-523.

Rapp, D. N., Van den Broek, P., McMaster, K. L., Kendeou, P., &Espin, C. A. (2007). Higher order comprehension processes in struggling readers: a perspective for researchand intervention. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *11*(4), 289−312.

Razi, S. (2004).The effects of cultural schema and reading activities on reading comprehension.In M. Singhal (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 1st international online conference on second and foreign language teaching and research* (pp. 276-293). USA: The Reading Matrix. Retrieved October 10, 2010 from http://www.readingmatrix.com/conference/pp/proceedings/razi.pdf

Razi, S. (2010).*Program on the reading achievement and metacognitive strategies effects of a metacognitive reading* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Dokuzeylul University, Izmir.

Reynold, R., Taylor, M., Steffensen, M., Shirey, L., & Anderson R., (1982).Cultural schemata and reading comprehension.*International Reading Association*, *17*(3), 353-366.

Ringler, L. H. & Weber, C. K. (1984).*A language -thinking approach to reading*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Rosowsky, A. (2000). Reading and culture: The experience of some of our bilingual pupils. *English in Education*, *34* (2), 45-53.

Samuelstuen, M. S., &Braeten, I. (2005).Decoding, knowledge, and strategies in comprehension of expository text.*Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 46, 107−117.

Sasaki, K., Yoshinori, J., &Gakuin, A. (1991). Effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. *Language Learning Journal*, *33*, 183-95.

Sasaki, M. (2000). Effects of cultural schemata on students' test taking processes for cloze tests: a multiple data source approach. *Language Testing*, *17*(1), 85-114.

Shapiro, A. M. (2004). How including prior knowledge as a subject variable may changeoutcomes of learning research. *American Educational Research Journal*,*41*(1), 159−189.

Shen, Z. (2004). Effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on EFL reading comprehension of American documentary narratives.*TESL Reporter*, *37* (2), 50–63.

Spyridakis, J. H., & Wenger, M. J. (1991).An empirical method of assessing topic familiarity in reading comprehension studies.*British Educational Research Journal*, *17*(4), 353-360.

Stanovich, K. E. (1980). Toward an interactive-compensatory model of individual differences in the development of reading fluency. *Reading Reasearch Quarterly*, *16*, 32-71.

Steffensen, M. S. &Joag-Dev, C. (1984).Cultural knowledge and reading. In J.C. Alderson & A. H. Urquhart (Eds.), Reading in foreign language (pp. 48-61). New York: Longman.

Strangman, N., & Hall, T. (2004).*Background knowledge.* Wakefield, MA: National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from

http://www.aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/background_knowledge

Tanaka, S. (2006). English and multiculturalism from the language user's perspective. *RELC Journal*, *37* (1), 47-66.

Tochon, F. (2009). The key to global understanding: world languages education-why schools need to adapt. *Review of Educational Research*, 79 (2), 650 - 681.

Tomlinson, B. (1998). Introduction.In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in languageteaching* (pp. 1–24). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Tomlinson, B. (2003). Materials for developing reading skills.In B. Tomilson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp. 340-355).London; Continum.

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallace, C. (2001). *Reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, E. (1987). Classroom reading through activating content-based schemata.*Reading in a Foreign Language*, *4*, 1-7.

Zhaohua, S. (2004).Effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on EFL reading comprehension of American documentary narratives.*ESL Reporter,37*(2), 50-63.

365 esl short stories. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.eslfast.com

Appendix A

K-W-L Chart

K	W	L

Appendix B

Example of Nativization

Original version:

Independence Day Parade

    It was, as usual, a hot and sunny July 4--Independence Day. Eight-year-old Jeffrey was excited about the annual parade. He wanted to see everything, and he wanted to see it now. But the parade wouldn't start until 10 o'clock. His mom Julia tried to keep Jeffrey in check. She made him clean his room and take the dog for a walk. When he finished these chores, she walked with him to the parade route, which extended about two miles along Main Street. The parade, as usual, was wonderful…

Nativized version:(Nativized parts are underlined)

<u>Ashura Day Dasteh</u>

It was a hot and sunny Muharram 10, Ashura Day. Eight-year-old <u>Reza</u> was excited about the annual <u>Daste-Ravi</u>. He wanted to see everything, and he wanted to see it now. But the <u>Daste-Ravi</u> wouldn't start until 10 o'clock. His mom <u>Zahra</u> tried to keep <u>Reza</u> in check. She made him clean his room <u>and buy a loaf of bread</u>. When he finished these chores, she walked with him to the route of <u>Dasteh</u>, which extended about <u>one kilometer along Valiasr Street</u>. Dasteh, as usual, was wonderful…

Appendix C. Sample Questions Based on the Original and Nativized Versions

Independence Day Parade

True/False items:
1- Julia let her son watch the parade because he finished the chores.
2- The parade contained 500 participants, at least.
3- It is typical for this day to be hot.
4- A few government dignitaries attended the parade.
5- Spectators cleaned the street when the parade was over.

Multiple Choice Items:
6- What did the Parade start with?
    a) a school band
    b) local realtors
    c) government dignitaries
    d) Boy Scouts
7-When did the parade end?
    a) at 10 o'clock
    b) at 12 o'clock
    c) at 4 o'clock

    d) at 2 o'clock

8- Where in the passage is the route of parade mentioned?
    a) Paragraph 1
    b) Paragraph 2
    c) Paragraph 3
    d) Paragraph 4

9- What type of information is included in this passage?
    a) An opinion
    b) A theory
    c) An argument
    d) A description

10- What did Julia do to keep Jeffrey in check?
    a) She asked him to watch the parade.
    b) She made him do the chores.
    c) She bought him a loaf of bread.
    d) She made him clean the kitchen.

Ashura Day Dasteh

True/False items:

1- Julia let her son watch the Dasteh because he finished the chores.
2- The Dasteh contained 500 participants, at least.
3- It is typical for this day to be hot.
4- A few government dignitaries attended the parade.
5- Spectators cleaned the street when Dasteh Ravi was over.

Multiple Choice Items:

6- What did Dasteh started with?
    a) a school band
    b) local realtors
    c) government dignitaries
    d) Basiji boys

7- When did the parade end?
    a) at 10 o'clock
    b) at 12 o'clock
    c) at 4 o'clock
    d) at 2 o'clock

8- Where in the passage is the route of Dasteh mentioned?
    a) Paragraph 1
    b) Paragraph 2
    c) Paragraph 3
    d) Paragraph 4

9- What type of information is included in this passage?
    a) An opinion
    b) A theory

c) An argument
d) A description

10- What did Julia do to keep Reza in check?
   a) She asked him to watch the parade.
   b) She made him do the chores.
   c) She bought him a loaf of bread.
   d) She made him clean the kitchen.