English Language Teachers' and Learners' Conceptions about the Role of Time in Iran's Education and Culture

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Received: 18 January 2016 Accepted: 15 February 2016

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In our age of speed and communication, time plays an important role in all dimensions of our lives. Globalization, which has brought about intensity of human relations, has raised the value of time. Time is a complex concept which has developed a specific meaning in every culture and society. People's conceptions about time have such high significance that some perceive them as the type of culture those people live in. Levine (1997) contended that a culture’s basic value system can be reflected in its norms and beliefs about time; thereby time is considered a social construct.

English language teachers and learners deal with English culture, in which time is highly valued. Using Bourdieu's (1984) terms, they are in a "field" in which time and punctuality are important, and which being punctual can turn into a "habitus". Therefore, it is assumed that because of their familiarity with English culture, these two groups may have different conceptions towards time and a critical view towards how time is managed in the Iranian society and the educational system.

2. Methodology

To collect the required data, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in Persian. The interviews were all conducted in language institutes. The number of participants was not set a priori and with 8 language teachers and 10 language

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learners saturation point was gained. The language teachers and learners were all teaching and learning at English language institutes in Mashhad, respectively. A set of eight questions was designed regarding the participants’ sociological conceptions of time. The first five items were broad, general questions, and the researcher added complementary questions in the course of the interview. The last three questions consisted of three hypothesized scenarios based on White, Valk, and Dialmy's (2011) study, in which the interviewees were asked how late each person in the scenario can come late. The social relationships in three situations were designed based on Scollon and Scollon (2001). Therefore, three relationships were taken into account: deference, solidarity, and hierarchy.

3. Results

Overall, the findings revealed that both teachers and learners are dissatisfied with time management in the educational system and everyday culture and they themselves have not been influenced by English culture's punctuality. The themes extracted from the interviews were the following: lack of adequate attention to time in the educational system, high potentiality for waste of time in language classes, a passive attitude towards time in Iranian culture and society, having the right to be late based on social relationships, thinking about the future and not the present, and not being influenced by western culture's punctuality.

4. Discussion

Due to their particular characteristics, English language classes have a different environment from other classes. Examples of these characteristics include: discussing various topics, doing group work, and having a friendly and fun environment (see Pishghadam, Zabihi, & Shayesteh, 2015). The aforementioned features increase the level of subjectivity in English language teaching (ELT) classes and learners try to present their ideas and opinions. They certainly do have many advantages for learners and can increase their creativity, emotional intelligence, willingness to communicate, and social skills. However, if management is not properly done, these positive points can lead to a waste of time in the classroom. Some learners' over talking lead to feelings of dissatisfaction in the others and decreases the efficiency of the class. The other issue mentioned in the interviews was error correction. What seems important is that error correction should not take up too much of classtime.

A particular aspect of English language classes is the comparison of learners' home culture with the target culture. Unfortunately, past research has revealed that this point often brings about deculturalization in learners and even teachers (Pishghadam & Navari, 2009; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011; Rahimi, 2011; Shahasavandi, Ghonsooly, & Kamyabi, 2010). It appears that learners and teachers pay attention to the negative aspects of Western culture and become influenced by it, but they do not show much interest in the positive aspects, such as punctuality and time management. The results revealed that in two types of relationship lateness was
considered acceptable, namely, solidarity and hierarchy. In case of solidarity, the close relationship that exists between the two sides allows for the tolerance of unpunctuality. This can be explained by the fact the Iran is a high-context culture (Hofstede, 1986). Similarly, the hierarchical context allows for acceptance of unpunctuality of the superior by the inferiors.

A contradiction found in the results is that although the interviewees showed dissatisfaction towards the delay of instructors in appointments, when they were put in the hypothetical scenario and asked about how late a university instructor can come, they mentioned long periods. This point demonstrates that in our society, the cultural aspect can be more favored than the moral or reasonable aspect.

As the findings of the interviews revealed, the basis of inadequate attention to time is culture. Time is an important concept in the field of language learning with many applications. Since learning English has become a necessity nowadays, there is a need for speed in learning to reach the required credits as soon as possible. Therefore, more research should be done in line with this study.

**Keywords:** Conceptions, Time, Educational system, Culture, Interview.

**References (In Persian)**


**References (In English)**


