

Effect of ‘Focus on Form’ versus ‘Focus on Forms’ Cultural Instruction on Translation of Culture-Bound Texts

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Abstract

The significant role of cultural background knowledge of the source and target language societies in the process of transferring meaning across languages whose speakers possess totally distinct cultures has been emphasized by numerous scholars (e.g., Malinowski, 1935; Nida, 1964; Toury, 1995; Agost, 1998; Agost, 1999; Paniagua, 2000; Nord, 2001; Riccardi, 2002; Albirini, 2009; Yang, 2010; House, 2015). To this end, the current study investigated the effect of cultural instruction in general as well as ‘Focus on Forms’ versus ‘Focus on Form’ methods of cultural instruction in particular on developing translation quality of culture-bound texts. Participants of the study were 98 undergraduate students of English translation at a university in Iran. These participants were divided into three groups: ‘Focus on Forms’ group which received explicit instruction about cultural features of the source language, ‘Focus on Form’ group which received instruction about cultural features of the source language through input flood and input enhancement, and control group which merely received translation exercises. Participants’ ability to translate culture-bound texts was then assessed through translating some excerpts of news adopted from Voice of America, following a 4-week intervention. The results of one-way between-groups analysis of variance revealed that both ‘Focus on Forms’ and ‘Focus on Form’ methods of cultural instruction are influential in developing ability to translate culture-bound texts at a high quality. The pedagogical implications of the findings suggested supplementing translation courses with cultural features of the source language society.

Keywords: Culture, Focus on Form, Focus on Forms, Instruction, Translation

1. Introduction

Integration of cultural features of target language society into foreign language instruction dates back to Grammar Translation Method era. In that era, students were assigned some literary texts carrying the cultural aspects of the target language society as the medium of their foreign language instruction. Then during the Audio-lingual Method era, in 1960s, the importance of familiarity with and awareness of the cultural features of the target language society shifted from the study of literature to language learning. In 1970s, Audio-lingual Method was replaced by Communicative Language Teaching Method which was claimed to integrate a specific language and the cultural features of the speakers of that language more naturally than a grammar-based approach. Since 1980s, advances in pragmatics and sociolinguistics studies have questioned the insufficiency of cultural contexts in Communicative Language Teaching Method instruction for foreign language learners to comprehend materials related to a society with a distinct culture from their own. Since then the attempt has been to fill the cultural gap within foreign language instruction (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Since the introduction of the insufficiency of cultural context in Communicative Language Teaching Method, numerous studies have been conducted on the impact of furnishing language skills with culture to bridge the cultural gap in foreign language instruction. To investigate the effect of cultural instruction on general language proficiency, Tsou (2005) conducted a study over two groups of learners of English at an elementary school in Taiwan: an experimental group which received cultural instruction and a control group which received regular English language instruction. Data of the study were collected through an English proficiency test and a cultural knowledge questionnaire both before and after the treatment. The results of the study showed that although language learners in both groups significantly increased their general language proficiency after one semester of English instruction, language learners with cultural instruction had a better improvement. Genc and Bada (2005) conducted another study over 38 learners of English at a university in Turkey to investigate the effect of cultural instruction on language proficiency as well as language learners’ attitudes toward cultural instruction. Language learners went through a culture course for one semester and then completed a Likert scale questionnaire. The findings of the study suggested that a culture class is significantly beneficial in terms of improving language skills, raising cultural awareness, and stimulating a positive attitude toward target language society. Rezaee and Farahian (2011) also investigated the effect of using target language literature on teaching target language culture to English as foreign language learners. Participants were two groups of upper-intermediate learners of English at a language institute in Iran: an experimental group which went through 15 sessions of instruction of literary texts covering cultural issues of target language society and a control group which was taught the same text with no reference to cultural issues. Data were collected through a series of target language cultural questions both before and following the instruction. The results indicated that although there was no significant difference in the performance of both groups before instruction, experimental group

showed a better performance than control group following the treatment. Finally, in a replication of the study by Genc and Bada (2005), Alhassan and Kuyini (2013) explored the role of cultural instruction on the development of language skills, cultural awareness, and attitude toward cultural instruction. Participants were 48 immigrants studying Norwegian language in a secondary school in Norway. All participants attended culture workshops as part of their language learning. Data were collected through a Likert scale questionnaire and one open-ended question. The results of the study showed that the course increased language learners' language skills, awareness of their own and target culture, and their attitudes toward the target culture.

The studies conducted so far have explored the influence of cultural instruction on developing language proficiency. However, despite frequent remarks on the significant role which cultural background knowledge of the source language society and the target language society plays in the process of transferring meaning across languages whose speakers possess totally distinct cultures (e.g., Malinowski, 1935; Nida, 1964; Toury, 1995; Agost, 1998; Agost, 1999; Paniagua, 2000; Nord, 2001; Riccardi, 2002; Albirini, 2009; Yang, 2010; House, 2015), very few studies have been conducted in this respect. As a result, the positive effects of cultural background knowledge on translation quality, as acknowledged by a lot of scholars, have not been proven yet. Therefore, apart from studies which have been conducted over the role of cultural familiarity and awareness on language skills, there is a growing need to determine whether developing cultural familiarity and awareness has any influence on translation quality. This is because it is believed that translation is not just a mechanical transference of meaning from one language to another language rather the translator needs to decode the meaning embedded in the source language and encode it into the target language bearing in mind the cultural aspects of both languages (Abu-Mahfouz, 2008).

Generally, there are two methods of instruction: 'Focus on Forms' method of instruction and 'Focus on Form' method of instruction. 'Focus on Forms' method of instruction corresponds to the traditional teaching of discrete linguistic structures in separate lessons and in a sequence determined by syllabus designers (Long, 1991) whereas 'Focus on Form' method of instruction explicitly directs language learners' attention toward linguistic elements as they come up incidentally in lessons whose primary concentration is on meaning or communication (Long, 1991). Applying both methods of instruction to present the cultural features of the source language society in translation courses using different approaches, the current study seeks to investigate the effect of cultural instruction in general and the effect of specific type of instruction ('Focus on Forms' versus 'Focus on Form') in particular on the development of translation quality of culture-bound texts. In this regard, the research questions to be addressed in the current study are:

To what extent does cultural instruction affect the translation quality of culture-bound texts?

Which type of instruction ('Focus on Forms' or 'Focus on Form') has a greater effect on the translation quality of culture-bound texts?

Accordingly the null hypotheses are:

Cultural instruction has no effect on the translation quality of culture-bound texts.

There is no difference between the effect of 'Focus on Forms' and 'Focus on Form' instruction on the translation quality of culture-bound texts.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Participants in the study consisted of 98 (36 males and 62 females) undergraduate students of English translation at a university in Iran. They were all at the last semester of their studies; therefore, they were supposed to have learned all translation techniques and consequently have a good command of translation ability. Also, based on an English proficiency test administered before study to select participants of equal level of language proficiency, they were all among those being placed at the upper-intermediate level of language proficiency; therefore, they possessed an equally high level of language proficiency. Their ages ranged from 22 to 28, with a mean age of 22.8. None of them had previously visited or lived in an English speaking country; therefore, they have not had the opportunity to be exposed to target language culture or have contact with target language speakers to develop their intercultural competence, that is, their "complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini 2006: 12).

2.2 Instrument

The instrument used to collect data consisted of a text flooded with cultural features of the United States. The text contained some excerpts of news adopted from Voice of America (VOA) which is the official external broadcast institution of the United States federal government. The criterion for the selection of the news excerpts was the inclusion of as many cultural features as possible. Researcher carefully reviewed current VOA news and selected excerpts which contained abundant cultural features of the United States. Furthermore, to make sure that the translators do their best to present a translation to the best of their knowledge, the text was kept within a page limit (300 words) to avoid making the translation task tedious.

To assess the validity of the culture-bound text, content-related evidence of validity was used. The researcher wrote out the definition of what he wanted to measure and then gave this definition, along with the culture-bound text and a description of the intended sample, to two professors at a university in Iran who were experts in the field of translation. The judges confirmed that the content and format is consistent with the definition of the variable and the sample of objects to be measured (Fraenkel et al., 2012). To assess the reliability of the culture-bound text, a pilot study was conducted over 30 nonparticipant senior Iranian undergraduate students of translation at a university in Iran. The reliability coefficient of the culture-bound text assessed through Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

2.3 Procedure

During the second semester of the academic year 2015/2016, all translation students participating in the study were randomly assigned to three groups consisting of two experimental groups of 'Focus on Forms' group (32 participants) and 'Focus on Form' group (32 participants) being trained in translating cultural features at different levels of explicitness and a control group (34) being trained in translating texts with no reference to cultural features. The participants, then, went through a four-week intervention period. The intervention was held two sessions a week, each session lasting 90 minutes. Instruction for students in 'Focus on Forms' group was through explicit explanation of the cultural features of the texts used as translation activities and comparing their heritage culture and the target culture, students in 'Focus on Form' group were assigned texts flooded with cultural features of the United States (input flood) for translation activities with the cultural features in boldface type (input enhancement), but students in the control group only received regular translation activities with no explicit or implicit reference to the cultural features involved in the translation texts. Following the four-week intervention period, the culture-bound text designed as the data collection instrument for the study was administered to all participants to be translated.

2.4 Data Analysis

The quality of translations of culture-bound text was judged by two professors of translation at a university in Iran. The professors marked the translated texts on a continuum ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 represented the worst and 10 represented the best translation quality. The criterion for assessing the translation quality of culture-bound text was based on House's (1977, 1997) functional-pragmatic model which consisted of three steps: (1) the source text was analyzed along the dimensions of Field, Tenor, and Mode. On the basis of findings on the lexical, the syntactic, and the textual level, a text-profile was set up which reflected the individual textual function; (2) the translated text was analyzed along the same dimensions and at the same level of delicacy; (3) the source and translation texts were compared. An assessment of their relative match was established: how the two texts were similar and/or different, given differing linguistic and cultural constraints (Thuy, 2013).

To assess the level of agreement between the ratings assigned by the two raters, the inter-rater reliability was assessed through Cohen's Kappa which is a measure of inter-rater reliability used to measure agreement between two coders (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). The analysis of Cohen's Kappa would give a value between -1 and +1. Landis and Koch (1977) have set a series of guidelines to interpret the values obtained through Cohen's Kappa. According to Landis and Koch (1977), values smaller than 0.00 indicate poor agreement, values between 0.00 and 0.20 indicate slight agreement, values between 0.21 and 0.40 indicate fair agreement, values between 0.41 and 0.60 indicate moderate agreement, values between 0.61 and 0.80 indicate substantial agreement, and values between 0.81 and 1.00 indicate an almost perfect agreement between the two raters. The inter-rater reliability assessed for the translated texts was 0.88 which according to the guidelines set by Landis and Koch (1977) indicates an almost perfect agreement between the two raters. For cases which received different ratings, the raters discussed until they reached an agreement.

To assess the general effect of cultural instruction (experimental groups versus control group) as well as the effect of specific types of instruction ('Focus on Forms' instruction versus 'Focus on Form' instruction), one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), which is used to evaluate mean differences between two or more treatments (or populations) (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013), was conducted on the ratings assigned to the translation of culture-bound texts. Eta squared was then assessed to examine the level of difference among the performance of the three groups. Eta squared can range from 0 to 1 and represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent (group) variable (Pallant, 2013). Cohen (1988) proposed a set of guidelines to interpret the values of eta squared. According to Cohen (1988), a value of 0.01 indicates small effect, a value of 0.06 indicates moderate effect, and a value of 0.14 indicates large effect. The graphical presentation of the performance of participants in 'Focus on Forms' group, 'Focus on Form' group, and control group on the translation test was provided at the end.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of the data. The descriptive analysis presented in the table consists of the number of participants in each group, the mean and standard deviation of the results for each group, as well as the minimum and maximum mark obtained by participants of each group. According to the descriptive analysis of the data, while both experimental groups ('Focus on Forms' instruction group and 'Focus on Form' instruction group) outperformed control group, 'Focus on Forms' instruction group (mean: 6.50) obtained a slightly higher mean score than 'Focus on Form' instruction group (mean: 6.06). The mean score by itself, however, does not show whether the difference among the three groups is considered significant or not. To determine whether the difference among mean scores obtained by each group is significantly different from one another or not the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) needs to be examined.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Data

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Focus on Forms	32	6.50	1.606	0.284	5.92	7.08	3	9
Focus on Form	32	6.06	1.664	0.294	5.46	6.66	3	9
Control	34	4.88	1.838	0.315	4.24	5.52	2	8
Total	98	5.80	1.827	0.185	5.43	6.16	2	9

Table 2 presents the results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances tests whether the variance in scores is the same for each of the three groups or not. In this regard, the significance value should be considered to determine whether the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been violated or not. A significance value of larger than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variance has not been violated, but a significance value of equal to or less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$) indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been violated (Pallant, 2013). The significance value for Levene's test for homogeneity of variances assessed in this study is 0.517. As the obtained value is greater than the p value of 0.05, the homogeneity of variance assumption has not been violated.

Table 2: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
0.665	2	95	0.517

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA). This table gives both between-groups and within-groups sums of squares, degrees of freedom, mean squares, and between-groups significance value. The main value of interest is the significance value (p value). If the significance value is larger than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), there is an insignificant difference among the mean scores on the dependent variable for the three groups. However, if the significance value is less than or equal to 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$), there is a significant difference somewhere among the mean scores on the dependent variable for the three groups (Pallant, 2013). This does not tell which group is different from which other group. The statistical significance of the differences between each pair of groups is determined through the results of the post-hoc tests. The overall significant value obtained for the analysis of variance in this study is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant result somewhere among the groups. Having received a statistically significant difference, the results of the post-hoc tests need to be considered.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	46.514	2	23.257	7.965	0.001
Within Groups	277.404	95	2.920		
Total	323.918	97			

Table 4 presents the results of the post-hoc tests. The post-hoc tests tell exactly where the differences among the groups occur. In this regard, the column labeled Mean Difference should be considered. If there is an asterisk (*) next to the values listed, this means that the two groups being compared are significantly different from one another at the $p \leq 0.05$ level. However, if there is no asterisk (*) next to the values listed, this means that the two groups being compared are not significantly different from one another at the $p \leq 0.05$ level (Pallant, 2013). The exact significance value is given in the column labeled Significance (Sig.). In the results presented, only 'Focus on Forms' group and Control group as well as 'Focus on Form' group and Control group, that is, experimental groups ('Focus on Forms' group and 'Focus on Form' group) and control group are statistically significantly different from one another. There is no significant difference between 'Focus on Forms' group and 'Focus on Form' group (experimental groups).

Table 4: Multiple Comparisons

(I) Groups of Participants	(J) Groups of Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Focus on Forms	Focus on Form	0.438	0.427	0.564	-0.58	1.45
	Control	1.618*	0.421	0.001	0.62	2.62
Focus on Form	Focus on Forms	-0.438	0.427	0.564	-1.45	0.58
	Control	1.180*	0.421	0.017	0.18	2.18
Control	Focus on Form	-1.180*	0.421	0.017	-2.18	-0.18
	Focus on Forms	-1.618*	0.421	0.001	-2.62	-0.62

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The graphical presentation of the performance of translation students in ‘Focus on Forms’, ‘Focus on Form’, and control groups on translation of culture-bound text is depicted in Figure 1. This figure provides an easy way to compare the mean scores for the different groups. As the figure shows, both experimental groups (‘Focus on Forms’ group and ‘Focus on Form’ group) significantly outperformed the control group on translation quality of culture-bound text. However, no significant difference was observed between the performance of translation students in ‘Focus on Forms’ group and ‘Focus on Form’ group (experimental groups) on translation quality of culture-bound text.

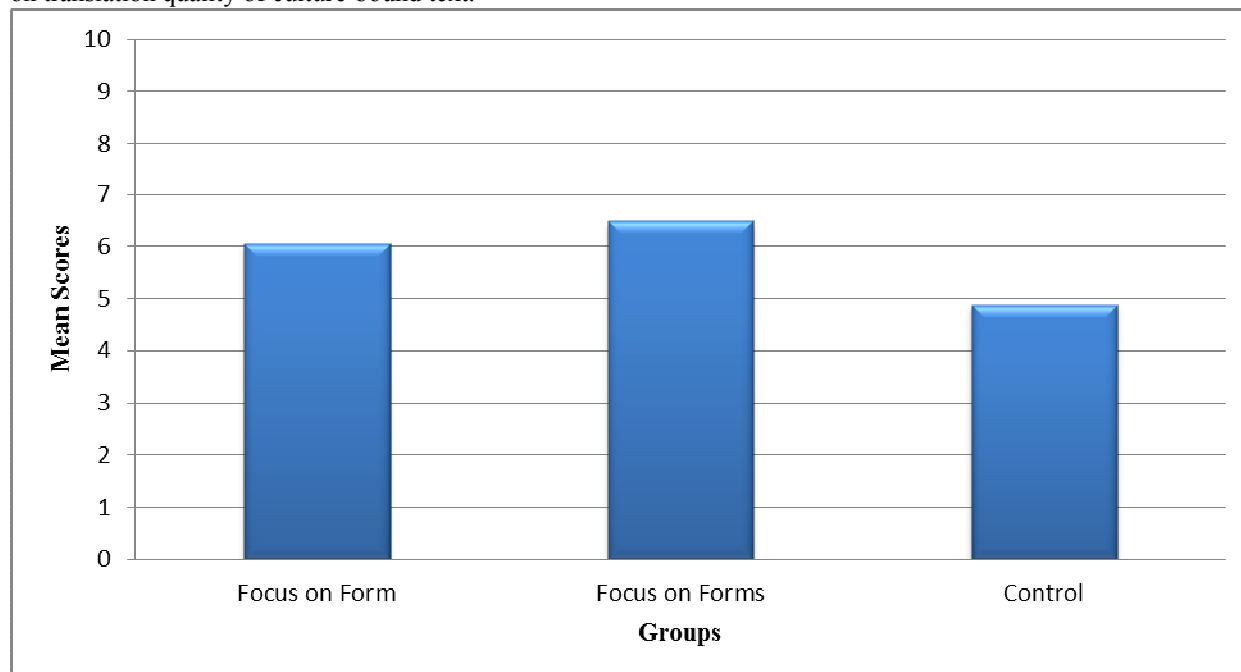


Figure 1: Translation Quality of the Three Groups of Participants

To determine the effect size for this result, eta squared which is one of the most common effect size statistics (Pallant, 2013) was calculated. The formula for calculating eta squared is as follows:

$$Eta\ Squared = \frac{Sum\ of\ Squares\ between\ Groups}{Total\ Sum\ of\ Squares}$$

Inserting the values in the formula would give:

$$Eta\ Squared = \frac{46.514}{323.918} = 0.14$$

The resulting eta squared value is 0.14, which in Cohen’s (1988) terms would be considered large. Expressed as a percentage ($0.14 \times 100 = 14$), 14 percent of the variance in translation quality of culture-bound text is explained by cultural instruction. This indicates that cultural instruction using both ‘Focus on Forms’ instructional techniques and ‘Focus on Form’ instructional techniques had a large significant effect on the translation quality of culture-bound text.

4. Discussion

The study found that incorporating cultural features of the target language society into translation courses can improve translation quality of culture-bound texts to a great extent. The study also found that both ‘Focus on Forms’ and ‘Focus on Form’ methods of instructing cultural features of the target language society have an equally positive effect on improving translation quality of culture-bound texts. Therefore, the first null hypothesis of the study which states that cultural instruction has no effect on the translation quality of culture-

bound texts is rejected, but the second null hypothesis of the study which states that there is no difference between the effect of 'Focus on Forms' and 'Focus on Form' instruction on the translation quality of culture-bound texts is confirmed.

These findings can be explained through Noticing Hypothesis and Relevance Theory. Noticing Hypothesis introduced by Schmidt (1990) states that "people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (Schmidt, 2001:30). This hypothesis emphasizes that in order to turn input into intake, input needs to be detected in the form of attention and awareness (Schmidt, 1995). Every input has a different value and only the input which is paid attention to and noticed turns into intake and becomes available for effective processing (Schmidt, 1990; 2001). Intake is part of the input which is noticed and paid attention to and is transferred into short-term memory and subsequently is integrated into the interlanguage. Interlanguage is a language which is independent from both the language learner's heritage language and the language to be learned (Selinker, 1972).

In the current era, the idea of creating a global village has come through. People are globally linked together and are exposed to cultural features of various countries through media and various technological tools facilitated by internet. The awareness of cross-cultural differences between target language and translation students' native language developed through cultural intervention has most probably made translation students in experimental groups notice these differences both through sociolinguistic and sociocultural filters in their online interactions with people of the target language as well as through the movies and other authentic materials they came across in their everyday life. This noticing and attention to target language cultural features has certainly resulted in turning most of this cultural input into intake and the subsequent ability to transfer cultural features appropriately across languages with distinct cultures. However, such cross-cultural awareness most likely was not developed in translation students in control group who were deprived from cultural instruction. This lack of cross-cultural awareness definitely led the abundant sociolinguistic and sociocultural input of the target language which they were exposed to in their everyday interactions to be unintentionally ignored. As a result, they lost the opportunity to help this abundant cultural input to be turned into intake and the subsequent ability to transfer cultural features appropriately across languages with distinct cultures.

Relevance Theory which was developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) also deals with two notions: the contextual effects given by a text and the processing effort required to be made by the readers to be able to comprehend the text. The principle of relevance mentions that "everything else being equal, the greater the positive contextual effects achieved by the audience, the greater the relevance of the input to the person processing it; however, everything else being equal, the smaller the processing effort required by the audience to obtain these effects, the greater the relevance of the input to the person processing it" (Rafieyan, 2015: 26).

In this study, translation students who received cultural instruction were familiarized with the sociolinguistic and sociocultural features of the target language and the similarities and differences with their native language cultural features. Therefore, they were most probably equipped with the knowledge of using appropriate equivalent expressions for source language cultural references to provide enough contextual effects for the translated text to help target language reader comprehend the text easily without putting too much processing effort. However, translation students who were deprived from cultural instruction were not probably trained in using appropriate equivalent expressions for source language cultural references in the process of transferring meaning across languages. Consequently, their translation did not provide necessary contextual effect to be easily comprehended by the target language reader.

The findings obtained in the current study are consistent with the findings obtained in the studies conducted by Tsou (2005), Genc and Bada (2005), Rezaee and Farahian (2011), and Alhassan and Kuyini (2013) who found that incorporation of cultural features of the target language society has a significant positive effect on improving language learners' target language proficiency.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that while both 'Focus on Forms' and 'Focus on Form' methods of cultural instructions are significantly influential in developing the ability to translate culture-bound texts at a high quality, there is no significant difference between the effects of these two methods of cultural instruction. Not only translation students who received cultural instruction either using 'Focus on Forms' or 'Focus on Form' techniques presented their translation of culture-bound text at a higher quality than translation students who did not receive any kind of cultural instruction but also both instructional methods resulted in equal development in translation quality of culture-bound text. Therefore, teachers of translation courses are advised to supplement their translation courses with cultural features of the target language society using whatever method which suits their instruction and instructional materials (Elyildirim, 2008; Rafieyan et al., 2013a; Rafieyan et al., 2013b; Rafieyan, 2016a; Rafieyan, 2016b; Rafieyan, 2016c).

The study was limited in some ways, however. First of all, the study did not include a pre-test to assess the exact effect of cultural instruction for each instruction type. Secondly, the intervention was limited to a short

period of time which might not be enough to show the distinct effect of specific instruction types. Thirdly, the study did not include a follow-up test to investigate the sustainability of obtained cultural knowledge. Finally, the effect of individual difference variables such as participants' cultural intelligence, attitude toward learning cultural materials, and cultural distance from the target language culture were not considered. As a result, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all translator groups. Therefore, future research is recommended to include participants of various levels of cultural intelligence, attitude toward learning cultural materials, and cultural distance from the target language culture and conduct a semester-long study based on a pre-test, post-test, follow-up test design.

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