Concept recognition deficiency among Palestinian learners of English vocabulary: cross-cultural communication

Abdul-Rahman Qadan

An-Najah National University
Palestine

Ekrema Shehab

An-Najah National University
Palestine

Abdul-Rahman Qadan: Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, An-Najah National University, Palestine.
| E-mail: mr_qadan@yahoo.com
Ekrema Shehab: Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, An-Najah National University, Palestine.

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Abstract

Inasmuch the process of learning English by Palestinian students is fraught with cultural linguistic gaps, this study pinpoints the notion that Palestinian learners of English, as a source language (SL), misinterpret or misperceive some English words or expressions that are SL-culture oriented, assuming their easiness and simplicity, thus dispensing of English dictionary consultation. The study demonstrates that, in many cases, Palestinian learners fall in the trap of an assumed understanding of some relatively straightforward and familiar English words or expressions, but, actually, due to a lack of appropriate exposure to English culture, these English-culture bound words or expressions become unconsciously conceptually misperceived by the learners. To this end, students of basic English courses, particularly Palestinian students of Remedial English at An-Najah National University, with two classes of a representative sample of eighty students, are the subjects of the study. The authors will test students' awareness of some words or expressions that they think students deem to be of relative easiness, but, in point of fact, they are cross-culturally problematic in the authors' own perspective. Apart from the few examples with cross-culturally problematic words or expressions the authors will provide, the majority of examples are from the Remedial English course. The study concludes that Palestinian learners of English vocabulary and expressions really get tricked by these ostensibly easy words, mainly due to a cultural gap; therefore, it provides recommendations that would bridge the gap and enhance understanding and accommodation of the other.

Keywords: source language (English); target language (Arabic); culture-bound; culture-oriented; misinterpretations; misperceptions; miscomprehend; context.

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1. Introduction

> The sociolinguistics of a society is about the social importance of language
> to groups of people and, hence, the sharing of meaning becomes a
> crucial factor in our attempts to communicate with others.
>
> Fasold, Ralph (1984: 1-2)

Learning English as a second language is wreathed in cultural linguistic gaps. An enormous number of words could transcend literal meaning into culture-oriented connotations. Immanent to an endless number of English words is their cultural context. Therefore, it goes without saying that words transcend literal denotations into cultural connotations where concept recognition deficiency of certain words or expressions becomes eminent in the process of leaning the vocabulary of the culture of the other; learning English words or expressions in isolation of their cultural context could result in persisting, perpetual miscomprehension due to cultural differences and gaps. Al-Jabbri et al. (2011: 60) stress that "[t]hese gaps are often the underlying reason for major misunderstandings or misinterpretations among the members of different cultural communities".

Since Palestinian learners of English are in focus, English here will be referred to as the source language (SL) as it is the conveyer of the word or expression, whereas Arabic is the target language (TL) since Arab Palestinian students are the recipients. The study is premised on the notion that Palestinian learners misperceive some English words or expressions that are culture-context bound, assuming their easiness and familiarity, thus dispensing of English dictionary use. The study pinpoints the assumption that, in lots of cases, Palestinian learners (TL-culture students) are often mistaken by an assumed understanding of some seemingly easy and common words, but, as matter of fact, since they do not have an adequate experience of English culture, these SL-culture oriented words or expressions become unintentionally conceptually misperceived by Palestinian learners. Al-Jabbri et al. (2011: 63) state that achieving the task of eliminating cultural gaps and misunderstanding of SL (English) requires wide consciousness of source language culture as to familiarize ourselves with the peoples' habits and 'the situation of their particular speech'.

To render things clearer, let us consider this example. The authors ask male students about the meaning of 'girlfriend' in the following context: "John and his girlfriend got married last month" (context provided by authors). The answer reveals that, according to the students' dictionary-reference-naked interpretation, 'girlfriend' means a 'female friend'. When the authors inquire if any of them has a girlfriend, most of the males raise their hands implying that they do. More surprisingly, most females also raise hands to signal having 'girlfriends', as well. The authors ask them all to consult dictionaries for the meaning of 'girlfriend'. Observing their faces, which start to blush after the dictionary consultation, the authors repeat the same question, but the other way round, address-

ing females in particular. Of course, complete silence prevails and none of them raises a hand. What does this indicate?

This is suggestive of a cultural gap between English culture and the Muslim Palestinian culture that reflects itself on students' comprehension of these relatively easy, yet tricky words that sound to require no dictionary consultation. Palestinian conservative learners of English perceive the terms 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' with an obvious interchangeability with the bare meaning of 'friend'. For our students, these words or expressions have no sexual connotations or associations. In addition, 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' in our Arab Muslim culture have the mere intimacy-free renderings of a he or she friend. This interpretation is quite plausible since sexual intimacy in our Arab Muslim culture goes under the taboo. Thus, neither boys nor girls are introduced to such sexual associations of such words or phrases by society. In fact, contrary to English culture, preserving honor and nobility in Arab Muslin culture inevitably entails avoiding and disdaining any acts of intimacy before marriage.

In a similar context, one female student's interrogative desire seems stimulated by the following example with the phrase 'boyfriend' from Lee's narration about her biking experience, in Tilbury et al.'s *English Unlimited* (2012: 143): "My first boyfriend had really a nice bike". The female student asks naively if girls here may have lots of boyfriends; it is very unusual that Americans seem to have a limited number of 'boyfriends'. This female student's question is very appealing; especially, it comes on a later occasion of in-class discussion when it turns out that she was absent from the previous class session, hence missing discussion of both terms. The authors ask her to look up the meaning of 'boyfriend'. Of course it is apparent from the expressions of her face that she undergoes a complete state of discomfiture. She just blushes in silence.

In the light of the cultural disparity the discussion above manifests, providing recommendations, in an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between SL and TL cultures, is a fundamental part of this study. Accordingly, the authors suggest strategies for a better perception of the SL cultural context. First, teachers need to maximize their efforts in explaining the cultural context of words or expressions that are cross-culturally confusing. In addition, they should exhort learners to expose themselves more to SL cultural contexts by watching movies or reading extra-curricular material, probably online. Finally, teachers should request their students to use the dictionary as an integral part of the educational process, and to carefully identify if learners understand the cultural context and implication of a particular word or phrase.

2. Significance of the study

Two important grounds lend significance to this study. First, the intercultural nature of this study makes it appealing and trendy. This study comes as an attempt to feature and bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between (SL and TL) societies that are culturally distinct. It

lays the ground for other similar linguistic intercultural studies that may enhance a better understanding of the other. Second, this study has a pedagogical impact. Since it clearly states how cultural differences between SL and TL can lead to the miscomprehension of some words or phrases which are deemed to be relatively simple by Arab Palestinian learners of English, the study actually provides cultural-gap-bridging suggestions. This necessitates maximizing efforts in the process of teaching and learning English vocabulary on the part of both educators and learners respectively, with more emphasis placed on the role of the educator, though. Byram (1989: 51) affirms that a teacher of a particular language is inevitably a teacher of its culture, and language and culture should be taught in an integrated manner. As a result, the study obviously suggests that consulting the cultural context of some English words or phrases and using an English dictionary may well sometimes be indispensable for achieving an appropriate perception of some English words. Added to that, the study advocates for more interaction between cultures through student-exchange programs that will promote a better consideration of the other.

3. Research methodology

This study, in whose context the authors serve as an authority by virtue of their experience of Western culture, yet belonging to Arab Palestinian culture, and by virtue of their being bilinguals teaching and lecturing in the Department of English at An-Najah National University, where most of the subjects of this study belong, aims to prove that Arab Palestinian students learning English vocabulary or phrases misinterpret some English-culture related words and phrases assuming that such words or phrases are relatively easy, and, therefore, no dictionary consultation is needed. Such misperceptions are typical due to cultural differences and inexperience of the culture of the other. In order to achieve the goal of this study, the authors, as instructors of basic English courses at An-Najah National University of Palestine, will rely on direct in-class contact with the students. Students of the basic English courses, namely Remedial English, at An-Najah National University of Palestine, serve as the subjects of this study, with two classes of a representative sample of eighty students.

Two reasons underlie this choice. First, and most important, basic English courses, contrary to specialization or major English ones, lack detailed, concrete English-culture-oriented situational contexts that may promote proper awareness and understanding among learners. Consequently, students are barely exposed to contexts that may lend complete cultural contextual clarity to the presumably simple words or expressions; such words or expressions come up in passing or in a transient manner in basic English courses. Second, Remedial English students represent an intracultural sociodiversity of Palestinian community with around 40 students in each class, descending from different cities, villages or towns. This could truly be representative and suggestive of how the intra-Palestinian culture could impact students' awareness of some English words, vocabulary or expressions.

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In the light of what is stated above, apart from students' consultation of the dictionary upon the authors request, the study employs two main tools: the Remedial English textbook and its students, on the one hand, and direct contact, observation and analysis of students' replies and reactions to some verbally asked questions about some words or expressions carefully selected from the Remedial English textbook over a whole semester's period and at different time intervals, on the other. However, the authors provide other examples of their own and one example from the course of University English I which have words or expressions whose meaning is the hit of a question and serves the purpose of the study. The ways questions asked are meant to fathom students' consciousness of specific English vocabulary or expressions which are carefully selected mainly from the textbook of Remedial English. These words or expressions are seemingly easy and typically require no dictionary consultation, but they, in reality, transcend literality into cultural connotations. Here, direct contact during classes, where the authors arrange to ask students questions pertaining to the meanings of some words or expressions, and cautiously observe whether students are aware of the cultural orientations of the selected words or expressions, is crucially important, as will be depicted in the course of the analysis below. After eliciting answers from the students, the students will be requested to consult their dictionaries and check what exactly a word or expression really means.

One important question may arise here: why should not the researchers opt for a questionnaire to examine students' perception of such words or expressions that they consider interculturally problematic? In fact, contrary to questionnaire-based studies, studies that involve direct contact with students allow for more action and interaction. Consequently, this gives the researchers a wider margin to carefully observe, fathom and monitor students' reactions and feelings towards the meanings of certain words or expressions. Another important point is that the researchers are scrupulously aware of students' sociocultural backgrounds. Therefore, they can easily associate students' answers with their intracultural sociobackgrounds and identify if any variations may exist on such bases.

For proper handling of the examples of words or expressions that are misperceived by students of Remedial English due to a cultural gap, the authors opt to categorize the examples into four groups. The first group includes words or expressions with sexual connotations. This group has the lion's share with four examples. The second group has three examples of words referring to academic institutions. The third has example of words pertaining to shopping places. The last consists of three examples connected to means of transportation.

4. Analysis of data and discussion

The examples here are classified into four categories: data with sexual connotations with four examples, examples of words or expressions referring to academic institutions, examples of words related to means of transportation and examples of words or expressions

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signifying shopping sites. Most of the examples are from the Remedial English textbook, *English Unlimited: Pre-intermediate Coursebook*, by Tilbury et al. (2012).

4.1. Examples with sexual connotations

In addition to the two examples discussed above in detail in the introduction, these two examples display deficiency in perceiving some English words or expressions:

> Example 3:

> "She formed a relationship with 38-year old Bruce Taylor, manager of the farm where she worked as a holiday volunteer. Kath left her shared house so she and Taylor could live together" (Rea et al., 2011: 47).

When the researchers ask the students of University English I, during the course of discussion, about the meaning of 'live together', almost all of them answer that it is similar to the literal meaning of 'live'. Although the context of the words explicitly signals a sexual implication of the expression, students are possibly unaware of it. However, one student, Kareem, who studied the whole of pre-university education period at a private American school in Palestine, has a different answer. He overtly explains that it could probably mean here that they 'live together' like a husband and wife or cohabitate before marriage. It is not surprising that his answer is quite astonishing to the class in which some students of both sexes express a sort of discontentment and uncertainty of the answer. To get it resolved, the authors ask the students to look up the meaning of 'live together' in their dictionaries to identify which meaning perfectly suits the context. Then, the researchers ask if the class agrees with Kareem's explanation. All boys raise their hands, but females blush and keep silent.

This example obviously signals the impact of the intracultural background. Kareem received his pre-university education at a private American school, which is considered to be a leading American-style school in Ramallah city, whose residents are deemed to be relatively less conservative and more open than people living in other parts of Palestine community. Kareem also ultimately affirms that he was taught by American teachers at that school and that they explicitly explain the meanings of any expressions as such. This plain clarification of such expressions with intimate implications may well be unusual or embarrassing for teachers at Palestinian schools premised in conservative communities. However, the American teachers at his school seem to contravene the cultural boundaries of Palestinian community due to a pedagogical necessity. In this respect, Leveridge (2013: parag. 9) maintains:

> Language teachers must realize that their understanding of something is prone to interpretation. The meaning is bound in cultural context. One must not only explain the meaning of the language used, but the cultural context in which it is placed as well. Often meanings are lost because of cultural boundaries which do not allow such ideas to persist.

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Palestinian teachers may seem to be breaking cultural norms as to explain such words or expressions bluntly even if an educational need arises. In contrast, American teachers at Kareem's school may find it typical, by virtue of their open culture, to introduce their students to any expressions as such and to disambiguate them. It strikes as plausible to the mind here to infer that established norms of appropriateness and inappropriateness set laws of expression in a particular culture. Highlighting the role culture may play in surfacing misunderstandings and conflicts between language educators belonging to different cultural backgrounds, Porter (1987: 372) argues that difference in cultural roots, ideologies and cultural boundaries which rein expression often contribute to the evolvement of misunderstandings between language teachers.

Before moving to the next example, one final point to make about Kareem is that he is Christian. This is likely to be a hint that Palestinian Christians probably are more open than Muslims to such intimate explanations of such expressions as they have more freedom to attend American-style schools.

Fourth example:

"Before we left, he asked me out on a date" (Rea et al., 2011: 123).

This is another interesting example since it yields a result contrary to the authors' expectations. Here, the phrase "asked me out on a date" may well be misperceived by Palestinian learners of English. However, students seem to perfectly understand the intimate message behind. As one male student points out, "we have already been introduced to the intimate connotation of 'boyfriend/girlfriend', so it is obvious for me personally that the 'date' here is not a regular date, but, rather, a romantic, special one". He also indicates that he could probably have miscomprehended it, had he not been acquainted with the culture-oriented sexual connotation of 'boyfriend/girlfriend'. Hence, when the authors ask the students to check their dictionaries for the meaning of 'date', most of them implied the clarity of the message with no dictionary consultation. This example could be viewed as concrete evidence that Palestinian learners can properly perceive a message that belongs to a distinct cultural background when educators give them a clue or signal. Moreover, students could be responsive to the cultural idiosyncrasies of a particular language if they receive proper guidance and instruction from teachers who really recognize tricky areas that could cause misperceptions or misinterpretations. Leveridge (2013: parag. 4) accentuates:

If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.

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4.2. Words signifying academic institutions

Contrary to its polysemic meaning in the SL culture, the word 'school' has its own distinct monosemic reference in TL culture. The authors give students the following two statements and ask them to guess the meaning of 'school' in each.

> Fifth example (two contexts of 'school'):
> · Jack started school at six.
> · John joined the school of business.
>
> (Authors' own statements)

When students are asked by the authors about the meaning of 'school' in the first context, they all point to primary, elementary and secondary education. However, it is not unusual to the authors that the question about the meaning of 'school' in the second context does not yield an answer that is significantly different. Most of TL (Arabic) culture students think that it refers to an ordinary school that offers business classes to secondary school certificate students intending to join the commercial stream. Sill, contrary to the authors' expectations, a guest student, Samer, visiting the class with a friend by chance on that day, says that he has a different opinion. He confidently indicates that it could mean 'a part of a college or university'. Most of the class seem discontent with that answer and some point out that 'school' is just 'school'.

It then turned out that Samer is a student whose mother is an American citizen married to a Palestinian and living in Palestine. He travels almost yearly to the United States with his mother to visit his mother's family. Samer restates that his uncle in the United States once came back from university and said that he was starving and wanted to have something as he had just come back from school. Samer explains that his uncle mentioned 'school' to refer to an undergraduate educational institution. Samer wonders addressing the class: "How can a twenty-seven year old man still be going to a 'school' of your own perception?".

It is no wonder that the class views this culture-oriented referential disparity with amazement. They are all surprised when they check their dictionaries and find out that 'school' in the SL (English) culture could equally mark both school and undergraduate educational institutions. This seems at odds with Palestinian-culture (TL culture) 'school', which signifies only educational stages up to twelfth grade only. This example seems, in point of fact, to perfectly augment the assumption that experiencing the culture of the other does inevitably help minimize culture-context-bound interpretations, which will in turn contribute to bridging the gap towards a better understanding of the other.

The authors envisage that the example of 'school', in its monosemic nature in the TL culture, yet polysemic nature in the SL culture, is very much reminiscent of Al-Jabbri et al.'s (2011)

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study entitled "Cultural Gaps in Linguistic Communication with Reference to English and Arabic Language Communities", in that both studies in some of their parts are quite in tune about why some misinterpretations occur. Al-Jabbri et al. (2011: 60) reflect that cultural gaps resulting in misunderstandings in TL culture can stem from the multireferentiality of some SL (English) words vis-à-vis the monosemy of the same word in the TL Culture. Exemplifying, Al-Jabbri et al. (2011: 60) hold:

> The differences in language use are the results of the existence of personal, social and cultural pressure on a particular language, as is the case with Arabic language which has its specific nature and cultural features. Words such as عم (uncle – the fraternal brother of the father) and خال (uncle – the maternal brother of the mother) or عمة (aunt – the sister of the father) and خالة (aunt – the sister of the mother) are cases in point.

> In English culture, there is only one reference to each which is uncle or aunt. When trying to carry out the same meaning in interpreting a text from a source language (SL English) to the target language (TL Arabic), these culture bound kinship terms will probably become problematic in the case of translation into English, particularly when their polysemic sense is continually relevant in a particular text.

Before moving to the next examples signaling shopping places, a detailed illustration of the following example with the word 'college' tends to underpin the case in point above:

> Example 6:

> At what age do people in your country do the following things?
> · start school
> · go to college or university

> (Tilbury et al., 2012: 18)

When the authors ask learners, in a different sitting, about the meaning of 'college', they give various definitions which are all correct. For them, 'college' could refer to an institution that offers only two-year undergraduate education, or it could mean a faculty in a university such as the faculty of Medicine or Fine Arts. They seem to miss an important meaning, nevertheless. None of them refers to 'college' interchangeably with 'university' before they are given the chance by the authors to look it up. This may well reflect a norm that is culturally typical: Palestinian students use 'college' to denote any institution offering two-year education or a diploma that is culturally inferior to the four-year education in TL culture. Bluntly speaking, indicating an inferiority of college education in comparison with a superiority of university education, the non-exchangeability of 'college' with 'university', in TL culture, is likely to have transcended the domain of education into a benchmark that assigns social status based on the number of years a person spends receiving undergraduate education.

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4.3. Shopping sites

Shopping sites could pose another dilemma of referentiality to Palestinian students learning English. Apart from the assumed easiness and familiarity of them in Palestinian society, two possible entwining cultural and social factors underlie misperception of the names of shopping places: the very rare actual existence of such places in Palestine as a developing country and the fossilized referential misassociations passed across generations that have become part of Palestinian culture. Emmitt and Pollok (1997) assert that the intertwining of language and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to another. In a similar context, Allwright and Baily (1991) assert that the process of learning a language could entail the acquisition of a new culture. They add that, unless the idiosyncrasies of SL (English) culture are transferred into learners along with the language, these fossilized misinterpretations remain. The two terms in the example below from Tilbury et al.'s *English Unlimited* (2012: 26) provide an adequate illustration:

"Well, supermarkets are cheap and convenient, but I prefer convenience stores".

While teaching students about food and shopping, the two terms 'supermarkets' (example 7) and 'convenience stores' (example 8) seem very appealing to the authors in that they may be cross-culturally problematic to Palestinian students for two reasons. First, the authors have always heard most ordinary Palestinian people call small shops supermarkets. Therefore, the authors would like to verify if this really applies to university students of basic English courses. Second, convenience stores are almost non-existent in Palestinian community. So, how would Palestinian learners of English react to this expression?

In accordance with the authors' anticipations, when the students are asked whether they go to supermarkets very often, most of them answer that they shop at supermarkets almost daily as supermarkets are so common in Palestinian community. When the authors ask them if there is one nearby, they reply that there is one outside, just on the opposite side of the University's northern gate. On the other hand, when the authors ask the students to look up the meaning of 'supermarket', they have a completely different opinion. They say they are not sure if there is one single supermarket in the whole city. They confirm that they are not aware that "supermarkets are so big and sell household products in addition to foods".

Apparently, students in Palestinian culture experience a problem of referential misassociation. They seem to mistake small shops, minimarkets and groceries with supermarkets. However, had students traveled abroad, visited big supermarkets and experienced the lifestyle sophistication of SL community or culture, they would definitely recognize what 'supermarkets' are.

Back to the second term, 'convenience stores', this term is likely to be more problematic and challenging to Palestinian learners of English vocabulary due to the referent's cul-

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ture-bound nature and unfamiliarity, so the authors expect the learners to render it liter-ally. When the authors ask English language learners about what 'convenience stores' are, the term sounds alien to them. Nonetheless, pressed for an answer, the learners' guesses boil down to something like a store or a shop that has facilities for convenient shopping, as the name probably suggests. Consulting their dictionaries for meaning, they say that this is the first time they come across such an expression. They seem all in alignment that it refers to a shop with extended working hours that sells a limited range of everyday items including some necessary medications. Surprisingly enough, they become aware of the absence of 'convenience stores' in Palestinian community; hence an equivalent is beyond speculation or visualization. In this respect, Al-Jabbri et al. (2011: 60) endorse: "[T]he different contexts in which a word is used, and their associated cultural features in the source language nature, make it more difficult to find the right communicative equivalent in the target language culture".

In cases as such where a quid pro quo relationship is absent, the authors' view falls in line with Hall's (1975: 11) perspective, which advocates that understanding certain contexts requires the background knowledge of the social and 'cultural codes' that are used by the people of the target language. In fact, Carbaugh (1986: 95) goes further pointing up the "need to learn cultural terms in order to develop sensitivity variation, especially when such variations reveal great difference in interpretations and analyses of source language". An important note to make here is that 'target language' in Hall's assertion could refer to En-glish, not Arabic, in connection with our study.

4.4. Words signifying means of transportation

Whilst teaching students about how to use a taxi in a lesson titled "Encounters" (Tilbury et al., 2012: 34), the authors could predict that students may confuse names of some means of transportation, namely taxi, service and shuttle. This anticipation results from the fact that people in Palestinian culture use only 'taxi' to refer to smaller means of transportation. The whole lesson in the textbook is about using a 'taxi', with no mention of service or shuttle. Hence, in order to figure out whether or not students can differentiate the three terms 'taxi', 'service' and 'shuttle' from each other, the authors have to provide another example of their own comprising 'service' and 'shuttle'. The examples in demonstration are:

Examples 9, 10 and 11:

"How much is the minimum fare for a taxi in your city?" (Tilbury et al., 2012: 34).

"When was the last time you used service or a shuttle?" (authors' own example).

When the students are asked about the meaning of a taxi, they answer that a taxi could be any smaller means of transportation or vehicle that helps people move from place to place. To find about if they know what a taxi refers to, the authors ask the students about how

many persons a taxi can hire at a time. The reply is interesting: "up to four persons". This, in fact, foreshadows to the authors that students may be aware of the difference between 'taxi' and 'service'. What is exciting is that when the authors ask the students if they know what 'service' means in relation to transportation, they reply that 'service' could be a means of public transportation with a particular rout and fixed fare. Amazingly enough, they insist that, in Palestinian community, people still call 'service' a 'taxi'. Students, as matter of fact, are absolutely correct in that Palestinian people use 'taxi' and 'service' interchangeably, as an inherited and established norm that has become hard to change.

When the authors eventually ask the students about the meaning of a 'shuttle', they show lack of knowledge of what it is. They just think it might be something like a spaceship. What was astonishing is that when the authors ask students to look up the meaning of 'shuttle', they say that it is very much like a taxi, bus, plane or a train that travels regularly between two places. They also state that, in Palestine, we do not have trains and planes, but we have only taxis and buses. Despite the fact that they have recognized the literal meaning of 'shuttle' in relation to transportation, they mention the word 'taxi' or 'bus' interchangeably with 'shuttle'. This reflects a cultural and social norm that Palestinian people do not bother themselves to assign the proper name of a transportation means to its referent. This is especially clear in the improper interchangeability of 'service' with 'taxi' although they are mindful of the difference.

In the light of what the authors have just illustrated above, there is one important notion dismissed and another endorsed. Whereas the authors debunk the notion that students know that a taxi is hired by only one single person only at a time, they reveal that despite students' knowledge of what 'service' refers to, they use it as an equivalent to 'taxi' in spite of their incomplete awareness of what a taxi is. Therefore, it may well seem awkward to use 'service' to refer to 'taxi', whereas the other-way-round use is an established and fossilized custom whose removal from Palestinian culture may seem theoretically unattainable. However, in practice, as change starts at school, eliminating these fossilizations is quiet possible since "the fundamental work of the teacher educators will be in framing the curriculum. They will have to involve cross cultural experiences as a part of the curriculum" (Aravind and Dwivedi, 2015: 63). This will, on the one hand, help remove any culturally inherited inaccuracies and "study, embrace and build an understanding of the other" (Aravind and Dwivedi, 2015: 63).

5. Findings and recommendations

This study on cultural concept deficiency among Palestinian learners of English vocabulary or expressions reveals:

- Palestinian learners of English words or expressions could be trapped as to misinterpret words or expressions whose connotations or contexts are culture-bound.

- These misperceptions and misinterpretations which feature a cultural gap are likely to be the result of
  — words or expressions' transcendence of literal denotations into cultural connotations,
  — learners' assumed easiness of such words or terms leading to an assumed dispensability of dictionary consultation,
  — lack of the experience of and scarce exposure to SL (English) culture.
- Palestinian learners' awareness of such culture-oriented words or expressions could vary depending how much the academic institution is open to English culture and how much effort educators make to detect and minimize the gap.
- Referential misassociations play a role in confusing referents.
- Lack of a communicative equivalent because of the distinct idiosyncrasies of SL and TL cultures could lead to literal interpretations that end in misunderstandings.
- Palestinian students are sometimes aware of the differences between some expressions or words, but the fact that these expressions or words are passed on as such from one generation to another renders them established and fossilized norms that are hard to eliminate.

Therefore, to minimize the cultural gap and promote a better understanding and accommodation of the other, the study recommends that

- learners have frequent exposure to English culture through student-exchange programs, movie watching, and extracurricular reading;
- educators make an extra effort to identify cultural gaps and bridge through clarifying words or expressions that they think their students may deem to be relatively easy but still they do understand them due a cultural disparity;
- teachers always take into consideration that a teacher of a language is also a teacher of its culture;
- Palestinian academic institutions try to hire, or seek volunteer, educators that belong to English culture.

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