

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Background of the Study

Malaysia opens her doors to students from various parts of the world with the mushrooming of many private institutions of higher learning and the move to internationalize her many public universities. As such, there is a steady flow of foreign students who made their way to the Malaysian institutions of higher learning not only because of her reputable standard in education but also due to the fact that its education fees are cheaper compared to that in the United Kingdom and United States and that in terms of culture, Malaysia provides a more conducive environment especially to students from Muslim countries. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 has great repercussions on many decisions that pertain to Islamic issues and the Muslims. Receiving education from a Muslim country like Malaysia is one of the decisions brought about by the devastating episode.

Iranians have also turned to Malaysia to obtain higher education and many of them are enrolled in the masters and Phd programs offered by both the public and the private universities in Malaysia. These programs are offered in the English language and as most Iranians learn English as a foreign language, they encounter problems coping with their studies. As such, they have to prepare themselves to master the language in order to overcome language problems in their studies.

How can we master a language? How can we conform to the language conventions in a foreign context? Why do only a few learners become near-native speakers despite

making many efforts? Prior to answer these questions, we should pay attention to what make a language foreign to us. A foreign language is not only about learning new vocabulary and grammar; it also entails knowing the different cultural rules embedded in that language. To learn a foreign language, the learner not only has to acquire the lexis and grammatical rules but also needs to become aware of how to use them according to the target culture and the basic differences from his native language as well. Though lack of language proficiency may be an important reason for misunderstanding, lack of knowledge of the cultural behavior of the target language community may also lead to misunderstanding.

Iranians who chose to study in Malaysia, brought with them their culture and way of life which they try as best to assimilate into the Malaysian culture. Nevertheless, it is not an easy task as it takes time for such an assimilation and along the way problems may arise due to clashes in cultural norms and behaviors. Besides that Malaysians learn English as a second language meaning they themselves are not so proficient in the language that they also need to cope with problems using the language. This would be compounded with having to use the language with another non-native speaker of English language like an Iranian. The culture and language load that is put in an interaction between a Malaysian and an Iranian can be rather heavy and this can bring about miscommunication.

In this study, interactions using some speech acts are chosen as data for the study because they are situation dependent and to perform them the speakers should consider different aspects such as; the hearer, his relationship with the hearer, the topic of conversation, the purpose of the speech, and the appropriate linguistic forms. Therefore the

speaker is required to have socio-cultural competence of language use in a language as well as linguistic competence to perform the speech act appropriately.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Today many people from different parts of the world need to communicate with and understand each other. This understanding is not easy because people grow up in different cultural environment which affects their interpretations. They view the world according to their cultural values, so when people from different cultures come together, the difficulties in understanding becomes greater. They see the world through the filter of cultural values and norms of their mother tongue and so even when they communicate in neutral language it cannot be culture free. Language as an essential means of human communication is highly cultural. Thus, more attention should be paid to the cultural aspect of language learning.

Any cultural paradox leads to confusion and misinterpretation. Sometimes, lack of cultural awareness of a group of people causes real difficulties, which may lead to hostile stereotyping attitudes and errors in our judgment. Sometimes the problem is not misunderstanding but simply refusal to recognize the validity of the other position. Although we cannot expect perfection, being aware of cultural differences may help us be more tolerant of differences, hence reducing cultural disparity in our communication strategies.

Kramsch, (1993) believes that good language learners may perceive difficulty in meeting social expectations in a new community. Learners may understand the words but

never be completely capable of comprehending their connotations beyond the literal meaning.

Although speech acts are very common in daily communications, there are limited cross-cultural researches on this base. This study focuses on the significant role that cultural awareness plays in language learning by studying the speech acts used by Iranians who had learned English as a foreign language in Iran without real interactions with English speakers, and who have later experienced living in a country where English is the second language. Results of this study in which Malaysia is the ESL country and the subjects are selected from Iranians living in Malaysia, show that Iranians face specific problems in their communications with local people in this country. Therefore, in every ESL country there might be peculiar problems related to communication besides the common cross-cultural problems happening in all of these countries. To date, there is no guidebook for Iranians to refer to on how to cope with life in Malaysia and to use English language in the Malaysian context. This study hopes to provide some suggestions on how to use the English language in Malaysia.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine the communication difficulties which lead to misunderstanding during real interactions. It will also put forward suggestions on how to overcome the problems as described by the Iranians who participated in the study. One clear step is being aware of the cultural differences and to encourage the learners to be independent researchers to study these differences and to develop the attitude of tolerance. Ultimately the present study attempts to encourage the awareness of correct analysis of

essential aspects of the target language and culture to assist teachers teaching English language and textbook designers for English language courses.

1.3 Research questions

The present study attempts to ascertain the significant role that culture plays in a better understanding of a language. Thus, it looks for miscommunications that can happen between people of different cultural background having to use English. Suggestions on how to overcome the problems in communication are also elicited from the study.

Research Questions:

1. What miscommunications do Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners face when they are in Malaysia, an ESL (English as a second language) country?
2. How can Iranian EFL learners overcome problems in cross-cultural communication in Malaysia?

1.4 Significance of the study

Studies on speech acts in cross-cultural communications have frequently focused on comparing the specific speech acts produced by speakers of different languages. This study is focused on problems in communication when using different speech acts in interactions between Iranians and Malaysians and the ways to overcome the problems as proposed by Iranians of the study. This information will provide the much needed guide to

Iranians on how to cope with problems when interacting in English with Malaysians. Similarly, it will help Malaysians in their interactions with the Iranians.

Furthermore, the problems identified will assist those teaching English to focus on matters about the language which Iranians found difficult. It will also provide information to English course designers to come up with courses that best suit Iranians and produce textbooks that cater to the needs of Iranians who need to cope with English language in an ESL setting.

Lastly, it hopes to highlight to the Education Ministry in Iran the need to equip Iranians with the right level of English competence such that Iranians can use the language effectively anywhere in the world.

1.5 Scope and limitations

This study will determine the problems that Iranians face regarding communication in an ESL country, Malaysia. In this study the perspective of the Iranian respondents who live in a country where English is the second language, is studied and analyzed. This study only focuses on the perspectives of Iranians in Malaysia and the specific cultural problems of Iranians in other countries is not covered.

In addition, the sample of the study comprises of Iranian students and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other Iranians. Another limitation is with regard to the number of respondents of the study. Thirty Iranians were identified as subjects of the study

but only twelve responded to the instrument. Even though various attempts were made to get the remaining 18 Iranians to respond to the instrument they were not cooperative.

Lastly, the study collects data based on only some speech acts and thus, conclusions of the study are limited to the specific speech acts of the study.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the main sections of this study were outlined. It covered the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, its significance and the scope and limitations of the study.

This thesis is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 presents the Introduction and this is followed with Chapter 2 which deals with the review of the related literature. In Chapter 3, the methodology employed in this study is explained and Chapter 4 is devoted to analysis of the data, which leads to findings. Finally, Chapter 5 states the conclusion and some implications in relation to cross cultural understanding and teaching and learning of English in Iran.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter literature pertaining to the main tenets of the study namely culture and language and speech acts in cross cultural communication is reviewed. Culture and language are so closely related that teaching language without referring to its culture is impossible. Therefore, this chapter is divided into sections such as culture, language and culture, culture in foreign language learning, Malaysian culture and language, Iranian culture and language, and speech acts in cross-cultural communication. This chapter will demonstrate the importance of teaching culture along with teaching language. In Section 2.1, the concept of the culture and some of its dimensions are discussed. The subsequent section examines the relationship between language and culture (Section 2.2), culture as a context without which language is meaningless. The theme of Section 2.3 is cultural awareness, which focuses on how a higher cultural awareness leads to a better language understanding and as a consequence less problem in communication. Section 2.4 discusses Malaysian culture and language which includes interesting information about Manglish. This is followed by Section 2.5 which is about Iranian language namely Persian and also some aspects of Iranian culture are explained in this sub-section. Finally, speech acts will be discussed where some studies on cross-cultural communications regarding speech acts as universal units of communications (Section 2.6) and methodologies used in analyzing speech acts in cross cultural communication (Section 2.7) will be reviewed.

2.1 Culture

Culture is a vague and complex term and there are numerous definitions for its concept and Scollon (1995) refers to “miniaturization of the concept of culture” (cited in Hinkel, 1999). A number of writers define culture as the way a person sees his place in a society, his perceptions of the world whether verbal or non-verbal that are accepted and expected by an identity group, (Hinkel, 1999 cited in Asante & Gudykunst, 2002).

Therefore, culture includes knowledge, belief, custom or any other capabilities that a member of a society acquires. It begins with imagining the world around us. “Culture is an assemblage of imaginings and meanings” (Lewis, 2002, p. 15), that particular people find in their experience to make it comprehensible (Hinkel, 1999). Cultural models derive from the world people live in. Those who live outside a certain culture have another interpretation because their sense about the society depends on their embedded with that specific society.

It was noted people belonging to the same group have many things in common that are comprehensible to them. Thompson (1990 p.132 cited in Hinkel, 1999) explains these meaning patterns are embodied in symbolic forms that are familiar to the members of that society which allow them to share their experiences and communicate. It is not surprising then, when people enter a new society many of these familiar cues are removed, because people of different groups have different values, in many respects. Culture invites you to different ways of seeing the world (Agar, 1994, p.20). Accordingly, Hendry (1995) claims knowledge of a society and the power with which it is associated maybe peculiar to that society. So, a person from a radically different society needs to comprehend the meaning

of the system, distinct to that society. Comprehension of this meaning generally includes two aspects: etic and emic.

Study of the behavior from outside refers to etic and from inside to emic points of view. According to Landar (1966), in new culture, the extent a person can realize which element is distinctive and how it is related to other elements, will be emic. In other words, emic relates to invisible elements, not easy to understand which undoubtedly become more problematic, particularly for people from different cultures. Smith (1996) explains both etic and emic have great value for analyzing behavior. Etic approach is used as a start to give a broad general view and emic is to understand the way a culture is constructed. It provides a basis upon which a predictive behavior can be expected. In a way it can be subjective. Gudykunst & Toomey (1996. p.10) argue learning etic aspects are possible through comparing similarities and difference across cultures. So knowing about a culture requires the study of its behavior from outside and inside of that particular system.

The way people think and behave is influenced by the value of their culture. The society and its members possess some objective values that make them distinct from other societies. These values which may vary from one society and another are known as the dimension of cultural variability. In the following paragraphs, 3 dimensions will be discussed.

The first, dimension is individualism versus collectivism. This is a major dimension of cultural variability. People from different cultures have different perception and orientations toward individualism, (Gudykunst, 1999). Cultures that place higher value on an individual than on a group are known as individualistic cultures. For example, in such

cultures, children learnt to be independent from an early age, and people tend to think of themselves. They chose whether they want to spend time with friends and relatives. Fitz Gerald (2003) claims in this type of culture, people think those, they must help should only be immediate nuclear family. Members of family in individualistic societies, according to Hecht, Andersen & Ribeau in (Asante & Gudykunst, 1999 p.168) do their own things, and live more remote lives.

The second dimension is, high power distance versus low power distance. High power distance cultures value inequality. Everyone has a specific place in the society and hierarchy is observed as a conspicuous feature of this cultural dimension (Asante & Gudykunst, 2002). Such societies are rather feudalistic, and any public speeches made have to begin by addressing the VIPs in the audience like in Malaysia. In low power distance societies, people like to be called by their first names rather than surnames or titles, and generally such societies are more egalitarian.

Finally, the third dimension is uncertainty avoidance. Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance have high level of anxiety, a great need for formal rules, and a low tolerance for uncertainty. Lack of tolerance derives from uncertainty and ambiguity in this culture (Asante & Gudykunst, 2002). Gudykunst believes second language competence is one of the factors which affect the reduction of uncertainty and anxiety.

Dimensions of a specific culture may be applicable in another. The degree of each dimension would affect communication between people from two different cultures. The further apart the two cultures are the more problems there may be in communication.

2.2 Language and culture

“Language and culture are interrelated with each other in the sense that: first, the syntax of a language is related to the concepts; second the vocabulary of a language is related to the perceptual abilities of those speaking it; third the vocabulary of a language is related to the norms of the society employing it; fourth the vocabulary of a language is related to the concepts of those employing it” (Cooper, 1973). Thus it can be resulted that language and culture are related as the syntax, words and sounds of a language are correlated to the ways that language is experienced and behaved in by its speakers.

Language, culture and thought are three parts of a whole and do not operate independently. Culture is an integral part of interaction between language and thought. Cultural patterns are expressed by language. The beliefs that reflect our culture, are waiting to be expressed by something, we call language. Language expresses meaning, meaning is attached to behavior, and culture is a way of influencing behavior, perception and language (Hinkel, 1999; Valdes, 1986). According to Hymes, interrelation of language and culture is so close that no particular cultural group can be studied without reference to its linguistic symbols in use. They are “connected inextricably” (Brogger, 1992) separation is impossible and undesirable (Byram, 1989). Language and culture cannot be analyzed in isolation. An Individual’s understanding of the world is expressed by language. Language and culture as “single universe”, language as one part of human behavior, and behavior articulates culture which determines how language is used to express meaning, the above issue has been discussed by (Kramersch, 1991 p.217) cited in (Hinkel, 1999).

Today, it is broadly accepted that learning a foreign language means not only mastering linguistic issues but communicating effectively. Clancy (1986) defines communication as “one of the most striking meeting places of language and culture” and describes it as “the way language is used and understood in a particular culture” (cited in Fitz-Gerald, 2003). Communication is closely related to culture in real life situations. According to FitzGerald (2003), as English is not a culture-free language, if communication is to be successful, then people have to share some referential meaning of the words, they send to each other through the medium of language.

Connotation is another part of cultural awareness which should be considered an important area. Language carries connotations, which help to maintain speaker sense of belonging to a particular social group. Language and culture come together at this point which is a dimension of learning. Wierzbicka (1991, p. 6) asserts: “To compare meanings one should be able to state them. In natural language, meaning consists of human interpretation of the world.” For example the word “privacy”, is very usual in English and shows one of the important aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture. In this concept a cultural expectation is shown which is very peculiar. It simply means that each person, at least part of the time, would need to have a little personal space around him or her and it is completely natural and so important. What is considerable that, this word does not have an exact equivalent in some languages. Cultural differences have innumerable lexical reflexes.

In face-to-face communication between people with different cultural backgrounds, there are problems dealing with language. One of them is to understand the vocabularies which are used in a specific language. Every language has its certain vocabulary that is definitely affected by its culture; thus, word for word translation of one language to

another is impossible. There would be misinterpretation and misunderstanding if words are translated in this way and communication fails consequently. A commercial slogan, for example, cannot always be translated into another language, because the translation might make a totally different meaning. The commercial slogan “Come alive with Pepsi” was translated into Thai language as “Bring your ancestor back from the dead” (Bov e and Thill, 2000, p. 71). There is similar case relating to translation. When General Motors introduced the car Chevy Nova into Latin America, it over looked the fact that “*No va*” in Spanish means “it does not go.” Sure enough, the Chevy Nova never went anywhere in Latin America.

As is seen, there is ample evidence that language and culture evolve together. Byram & Fleming (1998) indicate learning language requires learning beyond the linguistic system. If a person wants to communicate, one should go beyond that circle. To understand the language you have to understand differences between your language and the target language, and you have to think more than what you might find in grammar rules and any dictionary. Language is meaning, so the goal is not exchanging the words but the meaning, (Kramsch, 1993). Behind every statement there is a concealed meaning, (Bateson, 1972 cited in, Valdes, 1986). So the concealed meaning should be learnt by learners to make them good language learners.

2.3 Culture in Foreign Language Learning

Galloway’s model (1984) states; “the most obvious cultural aspects incorporated in the foreign language learning would be cultural conventions, and information about how

people behave both linguistically and extra-linguistically in common every day and crisis situations.” Some of the convention clusters which can be mentioned according to Galloway’s model are: street greeting, forms of address, excusing, thanking, greeting (according to hours of day), expressing respect, asking or giving directions, politely inquiring, leave taking, wishing and giving or receiving compliments.

So far we found that language learning needs to involve cultural awareness due to the social context of all language use. According to Valdés (1986), culture is hidden in every second language, and without recognition of cultural values, language is obscure. On the importance of cultural values, Samovar & Porter (1991) in FitzGerald (2003) write learning the values is “learning about the rules of a game”, without which we would make fools of ourselves. Good learners should be prepared to learn these values, which consequently result in cultural awareness. If we agree meaning emerges from social interaction then we should present cultural facts as part of the teaching process to make students understand otherness. Kramsch (1993) points out to culture, as information conveyed by language that is not the feature of language itself, so cultural awareness becomes objective, separate from language.

The term cultural awareness is used by Tomalin & Stempleski, (1993) to assert sensitivity to the influence of “culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication”. Comparison is an important factor in increasing cultural awareness; the ways they are similar or different provides the learners a better understanding of cultural issues. Byram & Fleming (1998) believe comparison between a learner’s own way of life and that of others is a basis for successful interaction with members of another cultural group. A good learner is aware of his own identity and cultural norms and of those with

whom he or she is interacting (Byram and Zarate, 1994). Distinction between inside and outside, (Hendry, 1995, p.167), changes barriers into bridges (Kramersch, 1993).

Now the question is: what would happen to the identity of the learners who are exposed to a foreign culture? Would their identity be not threatened? Concerning learner identity Hunfeld, (1990: 16, translated by, and cited in, Kramersch, 1993) declares “we cannot teach understanding of foreign as long as the familiar has not become foreign to us”. The person’s point of view, feeling and identity are disrupted by a change from one culture to another. In answer to this, Bochner (1982) argues learning a second culture does not mean the learner should abandon the culture of origin in favor of embracing the values of the host society. Beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors of learners remain predominantly first, a few researchers such as Byram (1989) Kramersch (1993) and Byram (1994) state learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another as their culture is a part of themselves. Learning about a new culture helps the learners become bi-cultural and operate effectively in both language and culture to achieve their goals. Fitzgerald (2003) argues it is up to learners how much they want to adapt to a new culture. The objective is bi-culturalism not assimilation. This means understanding the rules of others, while being aware of our own rules. Travelling between two cultures, belonging to one, understanding the other is what Byram & Fleming (1998) suggest.

2.4 Malaysian culture and language

Malaysia is known as a multi-cultural society. Native Malays are the main ethnic groups while large populations of Chinese (about 30%), and of Indians (about 6%) are living in this country as well. The official language is Malay but English, especially in business, is widely spoken (Retrieved from <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/Master/Web-Page/About-Malaysia/Culture-n-Heritage> on 25/06/2011).

“A number of different cultures like Chinese, Indian, Persian, Arabic, British have left their traces in the Malaysian culture but the culture of the tribal people who live in the country and the culture of Malays are what known as the original culture of Malaysia”(retrieved from <http://www.certificatetefl.com/malaysia-culture-language.shtml>). The population of this country is over 26 million people. Malaysia is located between South China sea and Indian Ocean and thanks to this geographic situation this country has been a meeting place for those who travel and trade from different parts of the world, for long time. Therefore Malaysia has a multi-racial and multi-cultural population, which includes Malays, Chinese, Indians and some other indigenous people.

These different races in Malaysia normally use the Malay language among themselves as Malay is the official language of the country. In addition, English is also widely spoken as it is the language of business in Malaysia (Retrieved from <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/Master/Web-Page/About-Malaysia/Culture-n-Heritage>). Nevertheless, “English in Malaysia is spoken in different accents characterizing speakers of various ethnic groups. It is also not unusual for Malaysians to accent-switch according to context. Amidst the cacophony of local accents arise issues about whether such accents

are correct or good or acceptable.” (Pillai 2008, p.42). As such, Malaysian English is affected by the different races and languages existing in this country, and it is sometimes derogatively known as Manglish.

2.4.1 Manglish

Manglish has many similarities with Singaporean Singlish and is considered as the Malaysian English speaking style. This irregular usage of English is mostly spoken by local people. But even locals normally speak Manglish among themselves and they rarely speak to foreigners or tourists using this style. For a local it may seem a little inappropriate and embarrassing to speak to a foreigner in Manglish especially to English native speakers because they are aware of appropriate usage of the English language. Besides, a non-Malaysian may not understand Manglish. It is noted that some foreigners who live in Malaysia such as university students and those who work in Malaysia have adopted this style of English speaking and seem to want to have easier communication by using Manglish. Table 2.1 shows the forms which are commonly used in Manglish. (Retrieved from Malaysia-trulyasia.com on 25/06/2011)

Table 2.1: Common forms of Manglish

Word	Meaning	Example
Lah	Is used to attest a statement (similar to "of course"). “Repeatedly used at the end of sentences and usually ends with an exclamation mark”(!).	Don't be an idiot lah!
nia/mia	Is used to attest a sentence (similar to "only"). “It is similar to "mah" and "lah" but used in a casual context.”	“Igot RM5 'nia' , he is very stupid 'mia”
Mah	Is used to attest a sentence but not as strongly as "lah". “Used at the end of sentences.”	“She's like that mah ”
Nah	Extract from the Malay expression of "Nah!". “This is not	“ Nah , take this!

	the usual 'Nah' which means 'No'. Used when giving something to another person.”	(Here, take this!)”
Meh	“Is used when asking questions, especially when a person is skeptical of something.”	“Really meh ?” “Cannot meh ?”
Liao	Means "already"	“No more stock liao ”
Ah	Extract from the Chinese expression "a". “Is used at the end of sentences, unlike meh the question is rhetorical.” “Also used when asking a genuine question.” “Besides that, some people use it when referring to a subject before making a(usually negative) comment.”	“Why is he like that ah ?” “Is that true ah ?” “My brother ah , always disturb me!”
Lor	Is used when elaborating or explaining something.	“Like that lor !”
Got	Is used as a literal translation form of the Malay word ‘ada’. “The arrangement of words is usually also literally translated.” “This particular particle is widely abused in Manglish, generally because of the difficulty for the Manglish speaker of comprehending the various correct uses of English verb ‘to have’.” “Therefore, ‘got’ is substituted for every tense of the verb.”	“You got anything to do? (Kamu ada apa-apa untuk buat?)” “I got already/got/will get my car from the garage. Got or not?” (Really?) “Where got? (To deny something, as in Malay Mana ada?)”
what	“Unlike British/ American English, the word ‘what is often used as an exclamation mark, not just to ask a question.”	What! How could you do that? I didn't take it, what .
d/dy	“Derived from the word "already". Often used in online chat room by the youth in Malaysia.”	I eat 'd' 'loh'
Leh	“Is used to soften an order, and making it less crude”	“Give me that leh .”
One	“Used as an emphasis at the end of a sentence.”	“Why is he so naughty one (ah)?”

Source: Malaysia-trulyasia.com

The Malay language is an Austronesian language spoken not only by Malaysians but all Malay people who reside in the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, central eastern Sumatra, the Riau islands, parts of the coast of Borneo and Christmas Islands in Australia. In Malaysia, the language is officially known as Bahasa Malaysia, which translates as the “Malaysian language” (Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austronesian_languages on 18/06/2011). According to the Star newspaper (September 4, 2008), to avoid being labeled as pretentious, some Malaysian people occasionally use Manglish to show that they have not completely abandoned their lingua franca.

It is said that English in Malaysia is low standard and even some Malaysians argue that they do not have to try to speak good English. These various arguments among Malaysian justifying this case are as follows: First of all, they say the primary goal of language is communication and “we aren't all linguists. So what if our grammar is imperfect? As long as we can understand each other, we are ok.” (Retrieved from <http://mmbraindance.blogspot.com/2005/07/poor-english-in-malaysia.html> on 18/06/2011) Next, is that Malaysians are from non-English speaking home town. They never had the right kind of environment in which they could immerse themselves in the language.

Insistence on good English is an expression of cultural imperialism is the third argument. English is not our native language and the language does not guarantee success, are two more arguments. The last one is that the lack of English knowledge did not stop so many people around the world from achieving economic prosperity. And there is no strong correlation between English and prosperity. Great men like Lim Goh Tong and

Loh Boon Siew are examples of those people who spoke very little English, yet did very well for themselves.

Nationalism just like independency and freedom is ideal for every nation. Some of the Malaysians who resist speaking Standard English present nationalistic reasons as follows: We are Asians. We have our own languages and we should be proud of our heritage. English is an important second language for us, and we should learn it as best we can (at least enough for us to be understood), but ultimately, it is more important for us speak our respective native languages better than it is to speak English well: (Retrieved from <http://mmbraindance.blogspot.com/2005/07/poor-english-in-malaysia.html> on 20/062011). It is also mentioned that by “promoting an English-speaking culture, we become more westernized as a result. Most people do not realize that once that happens, we all become indirect supporters of American/British hegemony. It results in cultural colonization!” (Retrieved from <http://mmbraindance.blogspot.com/2005/07/poor-english-in-malaysia.html> on 20/062011).

It is things like resourcefulness, entrepreneurship and hard work that we should try to teach our young people, and not drilling them to come up with grammatically correct sentences.

Doctor Mahathir Mohammad, one of the former prime ministers of Malaysia said “the notion that learning and mastering English makes a person less Malaysian is not true.” He said “language nationalists had spread the view that to learn English was to be disloyal and unpatriotic.” “They think that just being able to speak Malay, makes you a nationalist and that is wrong, It has been reported that the teaching of English in public schools and

universities here is not good enough to meet the challenges of the knowledge-based economy". He argued that "a "true nationalist" was someone who had mastered the knowledge and skills needed to compete against the rest of the world." He warned that "the world is not going to learn Malay in order to understand Malays." (<http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/2010> on 20/06/2011) and (<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-68702570/mastering-english-does-not.html> 20/06/2011).

2.5 Iranian language and culture

This section is to provide a brief delineation of Iranian language and culture to help the readers of this study to better understand Iranian language and culture thus provide information of the possible cultural problems faced by Iranians when in another country.

2.5.1 Iranian Language

The population of Iran is about seventy million people with different types who speak various languages of Indo-Iranian, Turkic, and Semitic. Indo-Iranian languages contribute the largest language group of the speakers, comprised about 70 percent of the population. Persian with various dialects is the official language of Iran. It is one of the languages which is spoken by the Indo-Iranian. Indo-Iranian is a branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Retrieved from (Kwintessential: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html> on 15/05/2011).

2.5.2 Iranian society and culture

To describe Iranian culture, several aspects of it will be explained in this section. The aspects are religion, family values, behavior in public and private domains, politeness and etiquette (retrieved from Kwintessential, Wikipedia, PersiansAreNotArabs.com and book of “Persian mirrors” by Elaine Sciolino, 2005).

2.5.2.1 Religion

The majority of Iranians practice Islam which governs not only their personal lives but their economic, legal, and political issues as well. Unlike most of other Muslim countries that are considered Sunni states, Iran is the only country in which official religion is Shi'i. Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism are also practiced by a few percent of Iranians.

2.5.2.2 Family Values

Family in Iran is the fundamental social structure and its concept is more private than in many other countries and cultures. There are some unwritten rules about female relatives; they are taken care of at all times and must be protected from outside influences. It is better not to ask about an Iranian's wife or even other female relatives because it is not appropriate. Iranians take serious responsibility to their families. Elderly relatives hardly placed in a nursing home and they are kept at home. Loyalty to the family is prior to the other social relationships. Like most parts of Asia Nepotism is considered a positive point (retrieved from PersiansAreNotArabs.com on 15/05/2011).

2.5.2.3 Behavior in Public vs. Private Domains

Iranians consider two distinct identities for themselves that they are: “baten” (private) and “zaher” (public). They must try to comply with accepted modes of behavior when they are in public. Only in their homes and among their inner circle of family they can feel free and be themselves. The inner circle which forms the basis of everybody’s business and social network always includes family members. Although friendship is very important and extends into business, family members are “relied upon to offer advice, help find a job or cut through bureaucracy” (Sciolino, 2005).

2.5.2.4 Taarof (Iranian Politeness)

Taarof, surprisingly an Arabic word, is a way to show politeness which includes both body language and verbal communication. Accordingly Iranians downgrade their own achievements to appear humble, though other people know it is simply their courtesy. They protest compliments and in public try to show themselves vulnerable (Sciolino, 2005). “In adherence to taarof, if you are ever offered something, like teas or sweet, even if you want it, at first decline it until their insistence becomes greater” (retrieved from Kwintessential: [http:// www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html) on 15/05/2011).

2.5.2.5 Meeting Etiquette

Introductions are normally restricted to members of the same sex since men and women socialize separately. Greetings tend to be affectionate. Men kiss other men and women kiss other women at social events. If they meet on the street, a handshake is the more common greeting. When Iranians greet each other they take their time and converse about general things. The most common greeting is “salam alaykum” or more simply “salaam” (peace) (Retrieved from Kwintessential: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html> on 15/05/2011).

2.5.2.6 Gift Giving Etiquette

Gift giving is one of Iranians’ decorum. At various social and family occasions they give and receive gift. Some of these occasions are; returning from a trip (the gift is called “soghat” means souvenir), when someone achieves a major success, and birthdays. On No Ruz (The Iranian New Year) it is common to give monetary gifts to children and those who have provided services during the year. Normally the money is new bank notes. “If you are invited to an Iranian’s house, bring bunch of flowers, or pastry to the hosts. When giving a gift, always apologize for its inadequacy.” It is better the gifts be pleasing and graceful in appearance. That is why most shops in Iran wrap the gifts. “Gifts are not generally opened when received. In fact, they may be put on a table and not mentioned.” (retrieved from Kwintessential: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html> on 15/05/2011).

2.5.2.7 Dining Etiquette

When you are invited by an Iranian to his house, it is better to check if your host is wearing shoes or not. If not, take out yours at the door, normally he puts your shoes in the shoe rack later. For Iranians dressing conservatively is important. Although some people are fashionably late, most of people appreciate punctuality. Like most of Asian countries you can show respect to the elder hosts and guests by greeting them first. Many Iranians do not attend mixed-sex parties and gatherings, so check to see if your spouse is invited. Your host shows you the guests' room which is usually decorated and furnished with Iranian carpets and European furniture. When receiving offer of drinks or foods remember to do "taarof".

Table manners: although sometimes meals are served on the floor, it does not indicate a lack of decorum. More modern people serve meals on dining table with delicate place settings. Feel free to try a bit of everything which is served. Iranian ladies prefer to make more food than you can eat. It is their part their hospitality is to shower guests with affluence. In Iranian house as a guest you should always expect to be offered several helpings. "Initial refusals are assumed to be polite gestures (taarof again!) and are not taken seriously." Leaving some of the food on your plate after you have finished eating is considered normal (retrieved from Kwintessential: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/iran-country-profile.html> on 15/05/2011).

2.6 Speech acts in cross cultural communications

Speech act theory by Austin (1962), tries to explain the ways speakers of a language use it to effectuate intended action and also how the hearers figure out the meaning of what is said. According to this theory, “functional units of communication have propositional or locutionary meaning (the literal meaning of the utterance), illocutionary meaning (the social function of the utterance), and perlocutionary force (the effect produced by the utterance in a given context)” (Cohen, 1996, p. 384).

Austin affirmed that language is performative, and speaker performs an act via what he says, normally when we say something we do something also, such as making a request or a complaint. Schmidt and Richards (1980:129) explain ‘speech acts’ as “all the acts we perform through speaking, all the things we do when we speak. The existence of speech acts is universal; it means every language on earth should be able to produce them. But the way and under what circumstances they are performed is culture specific.

Followings are some studies on speech acts in cross-cultural settings. In all of these studies cultural affects are clearly shown in the use of different types of speech acts such as compliments, complaints, thanking, greeting, etc.

Wolfson (1983) points out those differences in the distribution of ‘compliments’ in different communities are potential sources of intercultural miscommunication; that is, there is frequently interactional trouble when members of one cultural group compliment in situations in which compliments are inappropriate for members of other groups. She cites the time when former president Carter, during an official visit to France, complimented a French official on the fine job he was doing. Editorial comment in the

French press the next day revealed that Carter's remarks had been interpreted as interference in the internal politics of France.

In Indonesian culture, for example, Wolfson reports, 'compliments' are relatively rare and are used only among members of the educated class who have been exposed to Western customs. "Malaysian students in New Zealand confirm this observation, commenting that they were very surprised and somewhat discomfited by the frequency of compliments between New Zealanders (Janet Holms, Dorothy F. Brown 1987)."

Pelin (2007) in her study on pragmatic awareness of Turkish EFL learners via speech acts of 'complaints' suggests the need to raise pragmatic awareness of the EFL learners regarding the use of complaint strategies in particular contexts.

Sharifian (2004, p. 119), brings an example of 'thanking' from an Iranian student: "An Iranian student at Shiraz University receives from her American lecturer the recommendation letter that she has asked him to write for her and then turns to him and says, "I'm ashamed." Bewildered by the student's response, the lecturer asks, "What have you done?!!!" According to Persian culture the equivalents of the expression are being used when someone in higher position does something for you, for thanking the person. Illocutionary force can be used wrongly as it is shown in this example indicating device of thanking. The expression used sounds to be well-suited when somebody offended, rather than to present your appreciation and gratitude.

'Greeting' is performed differently in different cultures. A Chinese lady by the name of Waverly Jong, brought her American fiancé home for dinner to meet her Chinese parents for the first time. Later she said "I was still shuddering, remembering how Rich

had firmly shaken both my parents' hands with that same easy familiarity he used with nervous new clients. "Linda, Tim," he said, "we'll see you again soon, I'm sure." My parents' names are Lindo and Tin Jong, and nobody, except a few older family friends, ever calls them by their first names (Tan, 1989)."

In most of the different Indonesian cultures, 'greetings' are some questions that might sound personal or private questions, and simply are to maintain a proper relationship with people. 'Where are you going?' is an example of these kind of questions, when an Indonesian asks this question from somebody it never means a real curiosity of him but it is simply a way of greeting to a very close or known person. Therefore, normal answer is giving the minimum of real information. It might be rude to an American to be asked 'Where are you going?' because to him it might look like interfering in his business.

According to Y.A. (2008), speech acts "refer to the use of the rules of speaking of one's own speech community or cultural group when interacting with members of another community group. This occurs in interactions in which one or more of the interlocutors is using a foreign or second language but employing the rules of speaking of his or her native language. That is, they tend to transfer socio-cultural patterns from their native language to second language, while often they lack cultural knowledge in the target language. This may be partly an unconscious process. Sociolinguistic appropriateness sometimes seems so natural that it is easy to assume that it is universal. If the sociolinguistic expectations are similar, this is a useful strategy. But of course there are many situations in which they are not".

In most of the studies on speech acts, they are compared and examined to find out how differently they are used or how the first language of the learners affect on using these

units of communications. In this study, however, what the researcher is looking for is the miscommunications that occur with the use of different speech acts in an ESL country, namely Malaysia, during real interaction between Malaysians and Iranians as EFL or EEL learners of English.

2.6.1 Methodologies used in cross-cultural communication and speech acts

Houck and Gass (2006) investigate the notion of speech acts from cross-cultural perspective. Most relevant to this section is their discussion about the use of various methodologies regarding data collection for these studies.

The debate about the preferred way to collect data on speech acts was begun in the 1980's. In the book of "Speech Acts across Cultures" is mentioned "the weakness of written questionnaire data has been widely discussed, but less attention has been paid to the problems that exist with 'ethnographic' data" (Beebe 1992 cited in Gass, 2006).

Written role play questionnaire or Discourse Completion Test, were being used for collecting speech acts data across different languages (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1982; Olshtain 1983; Olshtain-Cohen 1983; Kasper 1989; Uliss- Weltz- Takahashi- Beebe, 1990). "The discourse completion test (DCT) is a questionnaire containing situations, briefly described, and designed to elicit a particular speech act. Subjects read each situation and respond in writing to a prompt" (Manka and Kristine, 1996). "Justified criticisms have been leveled at the DCT, some labeling it an instrument that limits the capturing of authentic communication, and others making it look almost obsolete"(K. Billmyer and M. Varghese, 2000). According to these criticisms access to authentic and reliable data using DCT is

under limitation in some aspects. Therefore, this study has adapted the instrument such that it allows for capturing of authentic data by providing open-ended questions instead.

On the other hand, Ethnographic data collection is the most reliable. It allows for observation of naturally occurring speech acts (Wolfson, 1981). Manes and Wolfson (1980) believed that collecting data in natural settings where participants were not aware of being observed is the best approach.

The different methods of data collection have various disadvantages and advantages, though the main purpose of many methodologies is the controlled elicitation of data which is comparable to the production of real-life.

The purpose of this study is not to compare specific speech acts produced by the speakers of different languages, but it is to look for the possible communication problems and ways to overcome them as well. The method to collecting data in this study is using an open-ended question list which is like the discourse completion test (DCT) used by Manka and Kristine (1996) in their study but are different in many ways. Unlike DCT in Manka and Kristine's study which provide situations to elicit particular speech acts, this study instead provide questions which include situations that make direct reference particular speech acts. Also unlike DCT, there is no prompt provided in answering the questions given. What is similar is that questions are given and that respondents respond in writing.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the review of some related literature clarified the necessity of teaching culture together with language. Since this paper is cross-cultural study of Malaysian and Iranian communications, sections were included that discuss the cultures and languages of the two countries. Studies and methodologies on speech acts in cross-cultural communications were also investigated in this chapter to show relevance of the methodology adopted in this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter elucidates the sample of the study, outlines the data collection procedures and explains how collected data will be analyzed. The present study is going to investigate cross-cultural communications of Iranians living in Malaysia which is an ESL country unlike Iran which is an EFL or EEL country. It makes use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative method involves calculating frequencies of occurrences of phenomena so as to establish patterns in the data. Qualitative method used is to collect comprehensive understanding of human behaviors and looks for the causes that govern such behaviors. This method of data analysis investigates a small number of communities. It also uses purposive sampling in which the sample is selected in a thoughtful way to achieve a certain goal, as opposed to random sampling which usually is selected randomly from numbers applied to a list of the entire population. “Because the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity, the objective was not to maximize numbers but to become “saturated” with information on the topic (Padgett, 1998, p. 52).” Similarly, this study uses purposive sampling and it focuses on small number of participants.

3.1 Participants

Based on purposive sampling, 30 Iranians who live in Malaysia were selected as participants of the study. They are Iranians who have learnt English in Iran. Regarding

miscommunications, the justification for not selecting Iranians who live and learn English in Malaysia is that, people who are exposed to a new culture, by speaking and communicating with local people would have improved their communication competence; consequently they face fewer problems in communications than those who had not been exposed to that culture before. Also it should be considered that English in Iran is a foreign language and the majority of people do not speak this language. Therefore, to make sure the participants use their English knowledge which was acquired in Iran, they are chosen among university students who are continuing their education in universities of Malaysia which requires acceptable English competence. However, out of the 30 Iranians identified only 12 ultimately participated in the study despite attempts to get the rest to respond to the questions in the instrument.

The 12 participants are 8 females and 4 males. Only one participant is a Phd student and the other 11 persons are master students studying at three public universities in Malaysia namely “University of Malaya”, “University Kebangsaan Malaysia”, and “University Putra Malaysia”. Their age, not chosen purposely, ranges from 23 to 42 years old. The length of their stay in Malaysia also varies and this is shown in Table 3.1 together with other details of the respondents. Pseudonyms are used in identifying respondents.

Table 3.1: Participants’ Details

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Education	University	Length of stay in Malaysia
1	Bahareh	Female	23	Master student	UKM	8 months
2	Farhad	Male	42	Master student	UKM	2 years
3	Khashayar	Male	36	Master student	UKM	2 years

Table 3.1, continued

4	Mehdi	Male	28	Master student	UPM	4 years
5	Negar S	Female	26	Master student	UPM	2years+6 months
6	Shabnam	Female	25	Master student	UKM	2years+ 8months
7	Elmira	Female	23	Master student	UPM	2years
8	Fataneh	Female	40	Master student	UPM	5 years
9	Mahsa	Female	27	Master student	UM	3years+ 4months
10	Negar N	Female	30	Master student	UM	6 years
11	Bahram	Male	24	Master student	UKM	2years+ 6months
12	Zahra	Female	34	PHD student	UM	1year+ 8months

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used to collect data of this study is adapted from the discourse completion test (DCT) used by Manka and Kristine (1996) in their study. In their study, they devised “a questionnaire containing situations designed to elicit a particular speech act. Subjects read each situation and write their response to the situation (p. 39)”. Instead of devising situations to elicit a particular speech act like that in Manka and Kristine’s study, this study formed open-ended questions to elicit information pertaining to certain speech acts stated in the questions. As such, the participants are freer to respond to the questions and not bound by the specificity of situations like that in Manka and Kristine’s study. Therefore, the data obtained would be more authentic. Five open-ended questions are formed but only three require responses pertaining to speech acts. Two other questions are devised to elicit subjects’ opinions and experiences with regard to miscommunication.

By responding to open-ended questions, subjects can include more details in their answers. This helps the researcher to find out respondents' true feeling on the case. According to Metodoloskizevezki (2003), "two quite different reasons for using open-ended questions are: to discover the responses that individuals give spontaneously; and to avoid the bias that may result from suggesting responses to individuals (p.159)".

A guide in how to form questions correctly by Tapia (2011) was used to devise questions by which researcher could draw out precise comments and information from the respondents. To form some of the questions, common situations in which Iranians usually face problems with in communicating in Malaysia were considered. The situations were identified based on the researcher's observation, personal experience and feedback from the Iranian community in Malaysia.

Based on the situations identified, three out of five questions for the question list were prepared. The situations include where Iranians need to ask for directions (Question 1); give or ask reason, apologize (Question 3); invite, greet and complain (Question 4). These are actually some of the speech acts proposed by Austin (1962). Thus, detailed answers and experiences of communication or miscommunication in different situations, where Iranians do real interactions according to social conventions with local people, can be obtained.

Two questions that is Question number two and Question number five do not make reference to speech acts. Question number two is prepared to elicit respondents' negative experience of miscommunication. Experience is important because knowledge comes from experience and it can give people wider perspectives. By including this question, the

researcher is looking for the effect of experience on improving communication competence.

Lastly, the fifth question is asking the respondents to recommend ways in which Iranians who plan to come to Malaysia will face fewer problems in communicating with the local people. With this question, the respondents' opinions based on their experiences communicating with Malaysians are derived.

The five questions used as instrument for data collection are:

1. Have you ever been in a situation in which you need to ask for directions from a person and faced a misunderstanding? If so, can you describe it?

2. Have you had any negative experience or feeling during your daily come and go in Malaysia, for example miscommunication with taxi or bus drivers? If so can you describe it?

3. What are the things you find similar or different between Iranians and Malaysians in behaviors such as joking, giving or asking reason, apologizing, invitation, etc?

4. Have you ever been surprised here in Malaysia by some other behaviors related to language, which was not familiar to you, by a person or persons? (e.g. greeting, complaining, daily conversation, etc)

5. If an Iranian person wants to come here, what would you recommend him/her to do in order to have fewer problems in communication with Malaysians?

In summary, the questions are about communication that involves some of the speech acts, negative experience in communicating with Malaysians and recommendations on how Iranians can overcome problems in communication in Malaysia.

3.3 Data Collection

The 30 sets of open-ended question lists were emailed or personally given to 30 Iranians who were either postgraduate university students or educated to a certain extent and are living in Malaysia. Within a month, 12 question lists with responses were returned to the researcher. Attempts were made to get the remaining 18 Iranians to respond to the instrument and to get the 12 Iranians who responded to answer those questions which they did not respond to.

3.4 Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, the transcribed answers from the respondents which are the raw data in this study were analyzed to draw the main themes and details in the texts. Based on an inductive approach the texts were sorted and coded to determine schemes of the data by means of thematic codes. “The inductive approach is evident in several types of qualitative data analysis, especially grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 cited in Thomas, 2003, p.3)”. According to this approach “the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 2002 cited in Reda, 2009, p.15). In this approach limited number of themes captures the key aspects. Thus in this study, themes which are of similar meanings will be linked and placed under major

categories. Some text units may be assigned under two or three categories and some of them were not coded to any source since they were irrelevant to the objectives of the study.

Once the categories have been identified, frequency count of each category will be carried out. The purpose is to establish which category exists more frequently compared to other categories. The higher the percentage of occurrence of a category means that the particular category can be said to be a major category while categories which occur less frequently will be considered as minor categories. This is the quantitative aspect in the methodology.

The final stage in the analysis is describing the categories and providing examples of their occurrences from the data. Subsequently, findings from the analysis will be used to answer the research questions and ultimately conclusions will be drawn.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology used in this study, the data and the steps which are carried out to analyze the collected data. In the next chapter, the data analysis is provided and the analyzed data will draw findings and provide answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4

Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the data collected is analyzed in accordance with the following research questions.

1. What miscommunications do Iranian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners face when they are in an ESL (English as a second language) country?
2. How can Iranians EFL learners overcome problems in cross-cultural communication in Malaysia?

The following sections reveal the result of the analysis. It will establish and describe the factors that contribute to miscommunication between Iranians and Malaysians in Section 4.1. This section will be divided into two subsections, one which describes language as a source of miscommunication and the four contributing factors to this source of miscommunication. The other subsection will describe culture as the other source of miscommunication and identify the three contributing factors that establish culture as the source. This is followed by Section 4.2 which will put forward recommendations to overcome communication problems, brought forth by the respondents of the study. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion in Section 4.3.

This study investigates the sources of miscommunication mainly based on speech acts used in normal interactions between Iranians and Malaysians. “Speech acts are realized from culture to culture in different ways and that these differences may result in

communication difficulties that range from humorous to the serious” (Gass and Neu 1995, p.1).

4.1 Sources of miscommunication

The analysis of the data identified several sources that contribute towards miscommunication between Iranians and Malaysians. Table 4.1 provides information from the respondents on the sources of miscommunication. These sources go under two main categories of ‘culture’ and ‘language’.

Table 4.1 Data from respondents regarding sources of miscommunication

Sources of Miscommunication Respondents	Differing Accent	Low Standard English of Malaysians and Iranians	Use of Mang-Lish	Lack of English Knowledge	Differences in Temperament & Habits	Differences in Expected Behavior	Different Meanings Accorded to Body Language	No. of sources of miscommunication
1.Bahareh				✓✓	✓	✓✓✓✓		3
2.Farhad		✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	6
3.Khashayar		✓	✓	✓		✓✓	✓	5
4.Mehdi	✓	✓		✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	6
5.Negar S	✓✓		✓		✓✓	✓✓	✓	5
6.Shabnam	✓✓				✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	4
7.Elmira	✓✓	✓		✓	✓	✓✓	✓	6
8.Fataneh	✓			✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓		4
9.Mahsa	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓		6
10.Negar N	✓		✓		✓✓	✓	✓	5
11.Bahram				✓✓	✓	✓		3
12.Zahra			✓		✓✓	✓✓		3

As seen from the table, respondents identified between 3-6 sources of miscommunication. They also identified some of the sources more than once. Two respondents faced only three types of miscommunication while three respondents faced six types of miscommunication each, the most number of miscommunication type. Interestingly, one of the three respondents who faced six types of miscommunication has been in Malaysia 4 years. One of the respondents who faced only three sources of miscommunication has been in Malaysia 2 ½ years. It can be said that more time spend in Malaysia does not necessarily guarantee an Iranian to have less problems with communicating with the locals. The various sources of miscommunication can be categorized into two major categories. They are the major categories of ‘language’ and ‘culture’. Each of the major categories has a few minor categories that contribute towards the sources of miscommunication. Table 4.2 presents the major and minor categories in miscommunication.

Table 4.2: Categories of sources of miscommunication

Major Categories	Language				Culture			Total
	Differing Accent	Low standard English of Malasians and Iranians	Use of Manglish	Lack of English knowledge	Differences Temperament & Habit	Differences in Expected Behavior	Different Meanings Accorded to Body Language	
Number of Text Units per category	11	5	6	12	21	29	10	94
Percentages of Minor Categories	11.7%	5.3%	6.3%	12.7%	22%	31%	11%	100%
Percentages of Major Categories	36%				64%			100%

Table 4.2 shows the percentages of major and minor categories which lead to misunderstanding based on the respondents' data. From 94 relevant text units, culture contributes 60 segments for its total 3 minor categories while language with 4 sub-categories shares 34 segments. Therefore, culture forms the biggest category (64%) followed by language (36%) in terms of the sources of miscommunication.

For the minor categories of culture, 22% of responses mentioned 'differences in temperament and habit' (22%) as a source of miscommunications and 'differences in expected behavior' with 31% while body language recorded 11%. Therefore, 'differences in expected behavior' is the largest contributor to culture being a source of miscommunication.

With regard to language as the main source of miscommunication, four minor categories have been identified as contributing towards miscommunication. The four minor categories are accent (11.7%), low Standard English of Malaysians and Iranians (5.3%), use of Manglish (6.3%), and lack of English knowledge (12.7%). Both accent and lack of English knowledge seem to contribute more towards miscommunication of this category.

The following sections will describe in detail the two major sources of miscommunication.

4.1.1 Language

The analysis shows that language contributes 36% towards miscommunication. In the language category, four minor categories are identified as contributing factors namely differing accent, low standard English of Malaysians and Iranians, use of Manglish, and lack of English knowledge. Based on Table 4.1, it is found that four respondents identified

only 1 language related source of miscommunication and one respondent identified all four as sources of miscommunication involving language.

In Malaysia, the official language is Malay and many of Malaysians speak English especially in business, the English language also is taught as a compulsory subject in all schools. But it is said that the English spoken in Malaysia is generally of a lower standard compared to other ESL countries and some Malaysians even argue that they do not need to speak good English. These arguments were discussed in the literature review (Section 2.5).

From the collected data it is identified that miscommunication occurred when:

1. Malaysians proficiency in English is poor (low standard of English) as stated by respondents.
2. Malaysians use Manglish words in their conversations
3. Either Iranian or Malaysian knows very little English.
4. Iranians cannot understand Malaysian accent when speaking in English and vice versa.

Therefore, it is found that some Malaysians use certain words and phrases which might be unrecognizable such as Manglish words or confusing in terms of accent to non-Malaysians. Furthermore, low English proficiency of Malaysians and Iranians and having very little or no knowledge of English also results in miscommunication. The following subsections will describe each of the language minor categories.

4.1.1.1 Differing Accent

Accent accounts for only 11.7% of the sources of miscommunication. Therefore, Iranians do not regard this as a major source of communication problem. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to developing an accent. Little things like grammatical

deficiencies, illiteracy or lack of actual foreign experience can be discounted. All that matters is that the accent sounds different and affected. The respondents have some difficulty in understanding Malaysians accents as noted in the following examples:

“I had problem in understanding of local people accent” (Negar S)

“Because of difference in accent and pronunciation of some words and names of the streets and places, sometimes we don't know what they say and we should show them the name and address” (Mahsa)

On the other hand, Malaysians also have difficulty in understanding Iranian's accent as indicated in the following examples:

“I asked several people... some did not understand me” (Shabnam)

“Some people here cannot understand our accent” (Fataneh)

Actually difficulty in understanding non-native speaker's accent, when they speak English, is a reciprocal problem and those who are used to an accent cannot understand others unless they pronounce the same way they do. So the more the accent is near to one's own non-native variety, the easier it is to understand. To answer question two one of the respondents had problem in understanding what drivers say about destinations and prices. Other respondents also identify the accent as a reason for miscommunications:

“...I was waiting for a long time while it was next to me ... Just because of driver's accent” (Negar S)

“... we found out that driver had heard something else” (Negar N)

“... he said yes but later I understood its wrong way” (Mahsa)

Therefore, from the answers we can conclude that respondents who were not familiar with Malaysian accent and Malaysians not familiar with Iranian accent can contribute towards miscommunications.

4.1.1.2 Low Standard English of Malaysians and Iranians

There has been considerable public concern in the local media about the low standard of English language among Malaysians and that some Malaysians do not feel that they need to speak English fluently. It is highlighted as a particular problem by some of the respondents about Malaysians using non Standard English and this can be seen in the following examples where English is used rather incorrectly:

“... many of us have been asked ‘You are from where?’” (Mahsa)

“after trying the skirt the girl working there told me ‘Can?’” (Means do you want it?) (Elmira)

The above two examples, show the effect of first language on Malaysian English which might be one of the reasons for low standard of English in an ESL country. If a Malaysian wants to ask the question “Where are you from?”, in Malay language he/she might ask “Awak datang dari mana?” and its translation in English word for word is “You come from where?”

The word “can” which is used by Malaysians in many situations is the translation of the word “boleh” in Malay. They put “can” in their speaking in English where ever they need to use “boleh”. In addition, singular and plural are used differently by some Malaysians. Some words are being used more by Malaysians even where it is not correct. The next example is an example of both:

“I heard many times ordinary people do not use plural and singular words properly for example they say ‘one children’.” (Khashayar)

In the following example, the respondent described a situation when talking to the principal of an institution:

“She repeatedly was saying “panama” together with English sentences. I was ashamed to ask her what was the meaning of that word or words, but later I found out she was saying “apa nama” just like people who use the phrase “What is this?” in English conversation.” (Farhad)

This frequent code-switching or mixture of first and second language in using certain speech fragments might happen even for educated people. This habit of Malaysians can be rather confusing to foreigners.

4.1.1.3 Use of Manglish

Manglish is a distorted usage of English that is mainly spoken between the locals and for foreigners it is difficult to understand. In conversation with your Malay friend, hearing “nak” at the initial position of an English sentence and “lah”, “meh” or “mah” at

the end of English sentences together with Malay accent can be quite a common phenomenon. This is considered as Manglish speech. Many Manglish words and phrases are given in the literature review chapter (Section 2.7).

“One word sentences are heard often when Manglish is used such as: “can”, cannot”, “go”, “come”, and in short phrases, questions and sentences such as “can or not?” “Want or do not want?” “Go or not?” “Also can one?” etc. However, some of these examples, such as “go” and “come”, are perfect when used as sentences on their own as far as English is concerned.” The following are examples from the data as evidence for the presence of Manglish in communication.

“I do not know what does it mean but it is surprising even when they are speaking English they use ‘lah’, ok lah!” (Zahra)

“come on lah, I treat you lah” (Negar N)

“can you slow the volume?” (instead of saying “can you turn it down?”)

(Negar S)

4.1.1.4 Lack of English knowledge

While English is the second language in Malaysia, some respondents were surprised at the situations when they found themselves communicating with people who just speak Malay and not English at all or they know very little English. The responses of

the Iranians who had met Malaysians who know very little English or cannot speak the language are as follows:

“.... they do not know English. I heard “Tak tau”(Malay for Don’t know) as an answer to my questions many times” (Fataneh)

“... happened for me to ask directions from people who knew the way but they could not explain” (Khashayar)

*“he (taxi driver) could not tell me the direction and asked me to follow him.”
(Farhad)*

It happened to the researcher herself when she asked the price of an item from the seller. First she received an answer in Malay. When the seller found out that the researcher could not understand her, she paused for a few seconds and brought out her calculator, entered the numbers and showed it to the researcher. That was when the researcher understood she could not or did not know the English numbers.

4.1.2 Culture

Culture makes up 64% or 2/3 of the sources of miscommunication. Thus, it is the largest source of miscommunication between Iranians and Malaysians of this study.

The relationship between language and culture in the field of English language teaching and learning was discussed in the review of related literature. In this study respondents provided much evidence that culture and language should be taught and learnt together.

Under this major category, 3 minor categories can be identified. They are:

1) Differences in terms of Temperament and Habits:

Temper as habit of mind, with respect to irritability or patience and habit as behavior pattern of people. Differences in terms of temperament and habit between cultures can lead to miscommunication.

2) Different meanings accorded to Body language:

Body Language refers to body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as a means of communication. If different meanings are accorded by different cultures to various forms of body language, this can result in miscommunication.

3) Difference in Expected Behavior:

This refers to what is expected regarding awaited behavior. If the expected behavior is not shown in certain situations, misunderstanding and miscommunication can happen.

The following subsections will describe each of the minor categories.

4.1.2.1 Differences in terms of Temperament and Habits

The minor category of ‘Differences in terms of temperament and habits’ made up 22% in the culture category as the source of miscommunication. Most of the respondents frankly admitted Malaysians are sociable and patient people. Nevertheless, respondents mentioned the differences in habits which sometimes result in misunderstanding as in the following examples:

“The difference is that Iranians are not like Malaysians, jovial and smiling people and in my idea, Malaysians are more helpful than Iranians but I think Iranians work faster and with fewer mistakes.” (Mehdi)

“Malaysians are mostly calm and they are more patient than Iranians, Iranians lose their temper so fast.” (Fataneh)

“The thing I like so much is their temperament when Malaysian meet each other, their face all the time are smiling.” (Mehdi)

The next two comments seem as if they are from two different points of view but actually the respondents were in different situations:

“Malaysians usually do not refuse any thing and they rarely say ”No”, they are more agreeable than Iranians and they thank people for everything even if they themselves do a favor for someone else.” (Zahra)

“As I noticed Malaysians can say “No” to some requests easier than Iranians, I mean they are frank in most of their communications.” (Negar S)

From these responses, part of Malaysian cultural characteristics can be concluded. Malaysians are agreeable people as long as they do not seriously disagree with something. They show their disagreement clearly as in the following example which another respondent explained:

“Malaysians are more comfortable to express disagreement but Iranians sometimes feel shy to disagree with an issue.” (Negar N)

“When Iranians disagree with something they normally make up a story but in Malaysia you are given the reasons, actually my experience refers to an official case.” (Mahsa)

These cultural differences in expressing yourself can be the source of miscommunications as the two sides could not understand the reactions of the other. Obviously the local people are not expected to know about culture of all tourists and international students.

Another example of miscommunication described by a respondent is:

“My Malaysian friends avoid explanations of a case and to make me understand they repeat same sentences rather than elaborating.” (Bahareh)

In a conversation, it happened that one side does not understand part of the other person's talk or cannot get the meaning. In this case, the first person is supposed to explain more, use more words or even give examples to make the issue clear. However, this was not done.

The next one is not only an example of misunderstanding but also of breaking the rules of the law which might eventually result in a misunderstanding.

“Once a taxi driver was watching a movie while driving, when I reminded him that he is taking a wrong direction, he started arguing with me as if it was my fault...”

(Shabnam)

Although in terms of history Malaysia is a new country in comparison with Iran and Malaysians are of a mixed culture while Iranians’ are mainly from Persian stock, as Muslim countries and that both are within the Asian region, there are general similarities between Malaysians and Iranians in terms of temper and habits. However, there are differences between the nationalities. Malaysian and Iranian culture is discussed in Chapter two in detail. The followings are about some of the differences between the two groups.

To talk about general temper and habits of Malaysians, in short, we can say they are calm and gentle people, they do not like war, they like to hang out at night at coffee shops, mamak stalls or any restaurants and chat with friends. They also care about food a lot, when they meet each other they say “Dah makan belum?” means “Have you eaten yet?”, its almost part of their greeting. They also like to ask about the cost of things you wear or own which is not commonly done in Iran.

4.1.2.2 Different meanings accorded to Body language

Body language makes up 11% of the sources of miscommunications. This contributes the least percentage to culture being the major source of miscommunication. Different meanings accorded to instances of body language results in miscommunication.

Charlen, 2012 said that “When one first learns to speak a second language, he may be deterred from fluency by the nonverbal signs” (retrieved from: http://soc302.tripod.com/soc_302rocks/id6.html). He also states that in different countries meaning is affected by culture, therefore misunderstanding may occur as different culture may see things differently. To complete his statement he adds that it is important to understand how performing smooth interactions requires eloquence with not only spoken language but visual as well. Although some gestures are universal, each country has its own body language which might have quite a different meaning from other countries. It is an expansive discussion. This study goes through this case to introduce it as one of the sources of cross-cultural miscommunications.

The respondents were surprised by some of Malaysian body language as mentioned in the following examples:

“Once I asked a girl “where is the nearest Mac Donald?” She brought her fist in front of her face and it seemed to me that she didn’t pay attention to my question. Later asking more directions from Malaysians, I understood they point out with their thumbs instead of index finger.” (Mehdi)

Although Chinese and Indians in Malaysia use index finger to point out, it is less polite to the Malaysians. They prefer using their thumbs.

Respondents also mentioned about the kissing sound made by Malaysians which is very unfamiliar to Iranians:

“Malaysian people call each other sometimes with some noise from their mouth,”

(Mehdi)

“use of “kissing sound” for calling other people in public!” (Shabnam)

According to these answers, which refer to a case in which four respondents expressed their surprise, not only because the way of calling is not familiar to the respondents, as one of them mentioned “in public” it shows an impolite behavior. To show the difference in the Iranian culture, this example can be given: if in Iran a man calls a lady in this way he will receive a big punch from her husband. Also kissing sound is an impolite behavior towards adults, especially those of the opposite sex, and only parents use it to play with and pat their infants.

“Head up” which is used by local people is also another gesture which means something different for Iranians:

“The gesture of saying “hello” in Malaysian language means “No” in Persian body language and it surprised me for the first time.” (Negar S)

“Malaysians turn their head slightly up to ask” What do you want?” or “what did you say” while in Iranian culture this gesture means “no”.” (Negar N)

To talk about general differences between Iranian and Malaysian culture in terms of body language, we can say, in spite of having common religious background there are some cases which can be seen in one culture as a normal gesture for communication which

is taken as an insult in another culture. Therefore, to have proper interactions, body language should be considered important to learn. Malaysians are different from Iranians in some simple hand gesture, spacing, waiting in line, shaking and nodding of head, waving and hellos and good-bye.

Here are some instances of Persian body language which show both similarity and differences with Malaysian culture:

- a) “Iranians remove shoes when entering a home or mosque, just like Malaysians.”
- b) “To signal to someone, they put one hand out with palm down, and curl their fingers in a scratching motion.”
- c) “The thumb up sign is vulgar.”
- d) “To signal ‘yes’ they dip their head down with a slight turn. And to signal ‘no’, they move their head up and back sharply.”
- e) “Like Malaysians, most of them do not shake hand with the people of opposite sex. But shaking hand with a child shows respect towards the parents.”

4.1.2.3 Difference in Expected Behavior

Expectations accounts for a noteworthy figure of 31% as a source of miscommunication. Therefore, it contributes the biggest percentage in terms of culture-related miscommunication. Expectations refer to expectations regarding behavior. This poses a problem when the expected behavior is not shown.

To interact with someone from another culture, stereotypes may help to avoid giving offense. But they also might result in misunderstanding if a stereotype disguises somebody's real intent or in the case that the awaited behavior is not match with your behavior. Sometimes when we do not face what we expect it ends up in misunderstandings. As one of the respondent says:

“My neighbors after saying hello asked me where I am going to!!” (Elmira)

This is totally different from Iranian culture where people are not supposed to interfere in others' affairs. But in Malaysia, when you are seen carrying something your Malaysian neighbor might ask “What is it?” or when she meets you in the middle of the day she asks “Where are you going?” or “Are you going shopping?” and similar questions which are just part of their polite greeting and they do not really want to be inquisitive or pry into the lives of others.

“Sometimes it's happening because of thinking is not truly as you want” (Mehdi)

“Once I went to UPM campus, there I asked how to get to science faculty. Some Malaysian students gave me wrong information. Also when I asked some people about taxi station or bus stop there, they got wrong in saying right or left.”

(Bahareh)

In the above example, the respondent was surprised because what happened did not meet her presumption. Iranians feel that Malaysians, no matter what their occupation or positions are, seem not to be bothered with what that is not related to their job. For example, in an organization everybody just does his/her job and has information limited to

only what he/she is supposed to do. So if you ask a question which is not exactly related or goes beyond one's capacity in language, the answer might be "I am not sure". It is contrary to in Iran where people are curious and instinctively try to know more than what they are supposed to know.

Since educated people are supposed to guide you better, Bahareh has higher expectations from university students than others. But the reality simply is that some Malaysian students know only about their faculty or their friends' only, and those who own cars and drive themselves are not sure about bus stops and taxi stations as this does not concern them.

Most of the respondents found Malaysian greetings different and surprising:

"When they meet each other and also for saying goodbye they use same word for hello (SALAM ALAIKOM)" (Mehdi)

It seemed very strange to Iranian for Malaysian to use the same word for "hello" and "farewell". Hello is the word used when starting a conversation or to be used upon arriving in a place, or calling somebody on the phone while farewell means ending a conversation, leaving a place or ending a phone conversation.

To prove the benefit of cultural awareness, one of the respondents says that he did not have any problem in a case which others seemed to have, because he had learnt about Malaysian culture. He answered question number two in the following way:

“No, because in Malaysia if you want to take a taxi, just say place’s (your destination) name and no need to mention details of the address.” (Khashayar)

In comparison with the other respondents who had problems with taxi and bus drivers he could find the way of correct communication. In Iran to take a taxi we inform the driver the name of the streets or the nearest square to the destination. Most Iranians including the respondents of this study did the same in Malaysia. However, this pose a problem as Malaysian drivers are not familiar with such a method of giving direction. In Malaysia usually it is sufficient to only give the name of a building or the area of the destination to the driver.

4.2 Ways for Iranians to overcome communication problems in Malaysia

The responses to question number five reveal the respondents recommendations for Iranians who decide to come to Malaysia and for those who are looking for some information about this country.

From the responses, respondents feel that despite what is said about Malaysian accent and the use of Manglish, Iranians who are planning to come over to Malaysia must be able to speak reasonably good English or else they will face problems in their communication. Examples of these recommendations are as follows:

“I will suggest them to improve their English before coming because it's most important thing to be in touch with others.” (Negar N)

“Then I will recommend them ... and also improve their English.” (Mahsa)

Travel to a foreign country for any purpose no doubt involves communicating with new people during the journey and stay in the country. If one cannot speak in the local language of the country one is travelling to and planning to stay in, then the role of English is quite important. English is an international language spoken and in such situation, it is the only language to be used to be in touch with others in the foreign country.

“Here they speak English if someone come to Malaysia and can not speak English he would be faced with problems.” (Fataneh)

Malaysia is a country where English is regarded as a second language and as such it is spoken widely. Therefore, it is a quite an appropriate suggestion given by the respondents for those who wish to visit Malaysia need to be able to speak English or else they will face problems in communicating.

The next example shows the necessity of knowing some basic Malay words and to be able to pronounce them correctly so as to be able to communicate with some Malaysians. It will be easier to have the Persian translation of these words as described in the following example.

“I myself will recommend him/her to try to use some basic words in Malay language and also use some dictionary books that they can use to understand some basic words in Malay language. The easiest way is to give them a paper with a list

of words that have a translation from Persian to Malay and that way they should pronounce it correctly.” (Bahram)

To share their experiences, respondents of this study strongly recommended that Iranians should have some knowledge about the Malaysian sociolinguistic conventions, culture and rituals before coming to Malaysia. They expressed their opinions by answering question number five as follows:

“...the other object is to know some information and rules about Malaysia culture, climate, and food and so on...” (Negar N)

“I will recommend them to get enough information about here and check everything before coming such as quality of life, fees of living, cultural compatibility and so on” (Mahsa)

Based on the respondents' recommendations before visiting Malaysia, Iranians may need to get some information based on the purpose of their visit. Information about the culture of Malaysia makes their communication with Malaysians much easier. It can be useful if they also be equipped with additional information such as climate of the different parts of Malaysia, and her local foods. The laws regarding immigration and visa are very important information to know as foreigners may encounter the necessity to handle matters regarding them. Iranians are also recommended to know the currency exchange rate, fees, prices of goods and other information that would help them to have more enjoyable, pleasant as well as hassle-free stay in Malaysia.

They also recommend to talk to those Iranians who have faced problems so that they can share their experience and to learn from them.

“...it is very helpful to talk with people who have quite same characteristics because they can share their experience and problems they have faced”

(Shabnam)

Finally, it is also recommended to respect Malaysian people and not to assume that they are Iranians in their ways.

“...respect the Malaysian people and do not think they are just like Iranians”

(Farhad)

According to Iranian culture, a guest is dear to the host but it is necessary for the guest to respect the host too. So it is recommended to Iranians coming to Malaysia to respect Malaysians as well as the official rules in the country. Respecting also sometimes entails the acceptance of the differences be it in terms of culture, people and also rules of the country.

“In terms of official matters which any foreigner may have to deal with I recommend them to stick to the local rules and try to respect local culture”

(Mehdi)

In summary, in order for Iranians to overcome misunderstandings in their communication with Malaysians, it is recommended that Iranians need to:

- i) Have an acceptable level of English proficiency for English is spoken as a second language in Malaysia.
- ii) Learn some basic Malay words and to pronounce them correctly.
- iii) Be equipped with some general information about Malaysia like weather, the food, price of goods and local currency.
- iv) Consult those who have been in Malaysia before in order to learn from their experiences about overcoming communication problems.
- v) Know Malaysian sociolinguistic conventions, culture and rituals.
- vi) Respect Malaysian people and the country's official rules.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the major findings of the study are explained. The respondents of this study who experienced problems in communication with the local people are those who use their English knowledge which they had acquired in Iran, where English is either EEL or EFL. Although the language is taught in schools, majority of the learners improve their English in different private and government institutes. Findings of this study show that although knowledge of the English language is essential, cultural awareness plays an important role to reduce communication problems and those who took the initiative to look for more information about the target culture and tried to understand the differences in any source of miscommunication were more successful and could overcome the problems in communication.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study and draws conclusions arrived at based on the analysis of the data undertaken by the study. The chapter starts with presenting the conclusions of the study based on the research questions posed. It then proceeds with the implications of the study and ends with a conclusion of the study.

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions

The following discussion will be based on the research questions posed in the study to present conclusions of the study. The research questions are:

1. What miscommunications do Iranian EFL learners face when they are in Malaysia, an ESL country?
2. How can Iranian EFL learners overcome problems in cross-cultural communication in Malaysia?

5.1.1 Question 1. What miscommunications do Iranian EFL learners face when they are in Malaysia, an ESL country?

The study established two major sources of miscommunication between Iranians and Malaysians as identified by the respondents of the study namely language and culture. Culture contributed 64% to the source of miscommunication making it the major contributor to the problem of communication faced by the Iranians of the study. The

various cultural factors that posed as problems are misinterpretation of body language, differential expectations of behaviors and in terms of temper and habit. With regard to language as another major source of miscommunication, Malaysian and Iranian accent, low standard of English, Manglish and lack of English knowledge are the contributing factors.

5.1.2 Question 2: How can Iranians EFL learners overcome problems in cross-cultural communication in Malaysia?

Based on their experiences, the respondents suggested that Iranians who wish to live in Malaysia should have a good proficiency in the English language. In addition, they should also know a bit of the Malay language so as to be able to communicate with many Malaysians especially the taxi drivers. It is also recommended that Iranians should have some knowledge of the Malaysian culture and norms, way of life and also to respect the Malaysian people. Thus, understanding the cultural differences and to be familiar with the variety of English spoken by Malaysians would greatly help Iranians in communicating with Malaysians.

5.2 Implications

The implications of this study are focused on teaching specifics of the target country such as culture and language and can be summarized under: cultural aspects and learner training.

In the literature review, it became apparent that learning a language necessarily requires learning its culture, otherwise it leads to some cultural misunderstanding. Analysis of the data in chapter four clarified that the English learning by the subjects of this study in Iran lacks a clear cultural picture and knowledge about English as a second language. It was concluded that the greater cultural awareness of some respondents, irrespective of their level of English ability, was due to their reliance on other cultural sources. This point is elaborated in learner training. Before proceeding with the matter it is important to have a brief look at the English teaching model in Iran.

5.2.1 A glance at English teaching model in Iran

English is considered a foreign or international language in Iran. Today, Iranians feel English is a necessity to be learnt for different purposes such as communication, employment, higher education, immigration, and even listening to English programs broadcast on TV. As the dominance of ELT is increasing, language institutions are growing in number to meet this high demand requirement. “New Interchange” is the most popular series of textbooks usually used by these institutes. Although evaluation of these textbooks is outside the scope of this study, it seems that these materials published in target language countries are rich in target language culture and are lacking in learners’ culture. Even in the case of target culture, the model used is always educated native speakers. In countries where English is considered as a foreign language, the cultural differences are greater so the role of text becomes more crucial as a reflection of cultural aspects, and the learner’s culture to enable comparison.

According to Smith (1997), ELT in Iran can be evaluated as English as an International Language (EIL) not EFL model. It has started a move away from EFL heading towards EIL.

The claim is that EIL is the use of English by people of different nations to communicate. So, it seems this language has multi-cultural features, and does not belong to any specific culture to which the language is related. It is assumed that learners then have to prepare to be exposed to cultural misunderstanding as the language they are studying is multi-dimensional including the culture of the whole world. What this study is trying to focus on, is to create further awareness of the values of the language that is being studied as this, is essential in understanding the language. This is because language is learnt within context and context is not culture free, and each language has its own culture. The point is that due to the complexity of culture, the learners have enough difficulties in learning a culture to which the language is related, let alone in learning the language, which does not relate to any particular culture. Being distant from the foreign culture, with any limited sources of information available, geographical distance, political and religious issues add to this problem.

5.2.2 Cultural Aspects

No doubt, analysis of the cultural aspects contributes to transparent understanding. It enables the learners to see the phenomenon if not from all, but from some different angles. Analysis can mitigate or even prevent prejudice feelings, because it opens windows to broader views and reveals some invisible aspects. Knowing more about foreign culture

is not in contrast with loss of identity if the learner's culture is not ignored. Conversely, it helps to a better realization of one's own identity. Perhaps the best way of analyzing a foreign culture is through comparison. In comparison, finding differences makes learners understand and finding similarities helps them recognize people of different culture yet have things in common. Rinnert in (Kitao, 1995) claims it is fascinating when learners discover similarities between their culture and the culture in contact because they learn they have lots in common. Finding differences causes them to think about the phenomenon better. The theory is that language without meaning makes no sense and most times concealed meaning is revealed only through explanation. For example, a teacher can explain the word 'individualism' has positive connotations in some cultures, and negative in others. He can discuss that in some cultures, it is good to be an individualist or it does not mean forgetting about families or elders but it is a matter of independence. Reich (1991) believes that appropriate learning is achieved when students analyze the reality, to be trained to be skeptical, curious, and creative. They have to learn to "give credit to others", to learn to negotiate, to explain their own interpretations and view the things from other perspectives. In analysis, the more perspectives one applies, the better one can grasp the full range of cultural dimensions of a text, (Kellner 1997).

It is clarified that materials with significant various cultural information along with analysis can be helpful in teaching a foreign culture. Whether this is sufficient or learners have responsibility is the subject of the following part.

5.2.3 Learner training

Although analyzing the different aspects of target culture appropriately, seems to be useful for teaching culture together with language, due to difficulties in teaching, learners' role should not be ignored. In fact, learning culture and different aspects of a foreign language requires an attempt on teachers and learners. Consequently, this section concentrates on learners. Learners should be trained to know their job and not to rely on the ready-made information offered to them by teachers and within the classroom framework. They have to achieve the goal of language learning and communicating the best way possible, if they become independent researchers in the target language and its culture. To do so, from the start they have to be aware of interrelationship between culture and language and especially the essentiality of including culture and other specifics of the language in the study of language, if their goal is ability to use the language in an accurate form. Training enables the learners to know they are not passive participants in the teaching and learning process. Learners should be encouraged to be cultural observers and researchers, to be aware that the field of culture is always changing. Therefore, reliance only on classroom materials does not let them keep up with its ever-increasing speed. Although full understanding of all aspects is impossible, at least it helps them increase their awareness and prevent failure in many cases. This requirement is met through different ways. Perhaps the best way is encouraging the learners to study about the different aspects of the target culture and try to become familiar with different accents which might be used and communicate with the people of the target language country, if possible.

In learning language and culture, learners are not supposed to agree or disagree with an argument but to understand other ways of thinking and living. To learn not to be one sided, but to be tolerant to differences. Learners' first job according to Smithson & Ruff, (1994) is to read and understand an argument as a form of interpretation.

When learners are trained to look for other cultural sources other than in the classrooms, they become more interested. This is because they follow the subject they like, without being confronted with a formal request on the teacher's part. When they are interested, they are encouraged to know more, ask more, and discuss their favorite subjects more. This is through discussion where they learn to appreciate other viewpoints. They learn that they should not expect all people to think like them and to be like them. This helps them to explain behavior, accent, temper and habit or reaction that has been evaluated in less positive ways.

5.3 Conclusion

To sum up, the emphasis of this dissertation was on linguistic and cultural misunderstanding confronting Iranian adult language learners in Malaysia as an ESL country. The conclusion that can be drawn is that development of individual cultural awareness depends on integration of culture and language. Attention to cultural details doubles the usefulness of learning process under specific conditions. First those who are in charge of designing teaching materials should attempt to combine positive and negative and different aspects of target language and culture. Second those who are in charge of teaching and using any other neutral language such as English should consider the

importance of understanding the different fields of cultural behavior. The crucial elements should be recognized and analyzed based on the culture of learners. Perhaps it may be useful if language teachers are trained in cultural course before teaching language. Problems result in misunderstanding which sometimes lead to negative evaluation, so challenging stereotyping is the responsibility of those dealing with language teaching and designing the materials who should involve the cultural aspect of the country where foreign language is learnt for comparison. Therefore, learners should be trained not only to rely on classroom materials, but also to look for other sources based on their own interests if their goal is to be a better language learner.

Even though there are some researchers and writers who say English is itself not a culture-free language, one must understand that each variety of English is bound closely to the sociolinguistic conventions of its own group of users. The knowledge of the cultural behavior of other ethnic groups plays an important role in helping an individual adapt socially to a new ethnic group, thus reducing miscommunication and social friction.

