

INTERACTIONIST DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT FROM A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF GENDER

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ABSTRACT

The present study sought to explore any significant differences among the vocabulary learning of male and female EFL learners with similar cultural dimensions as the result of receiving interactionist dynamic assessment. Initially, 120 adult EFL intermediate learners at Shokuh Language Institute in Gonabad were selected based on convenience sampling from among 15 such classes. The cultural dimension questionnaire was given to the participants to identify their cultural orientations. After identifying the cultural orientations of the learners, the VKS proposed by Wesche and Paribakht (1993) was translated into Persian and learners were asked to rate the vocabulary items in a 100 vocabulary list based on the scale. The rationale behind this procedure was selecting unfamiliar vocabulary items by the learners. Based on VKS, the learners selected 40 vocabulary items. Ten sessions were determined for teaching these 40 selected words to all the learners using interactionist dynamic assessment. Having finished 10 sessions in which the 40 unknown words were covered, a 40-item vocabulary test devised by the researcher was administered to the groups to test their vocabulary performance. The results of independent samples t-test revealed that there were no significant differences between the performances of the female and male learners with similar cultural dimensions. However, it was found that female learners with masculinity/femininity dimension outperformed the male learners on the vocabulary test. Based on the findings of the present study, teachers are encouraged to take learners' cultural orientations and gender into account when performing a dynamic assessment.

Keywords: *Dynamic Assessment; Interactionist Dynamic Assessment; Vocabulary Culture; Cultural Dimensions; Gender.*

INTRODUCTION

As Haywood and Lidz (2007) argued, one of the main concerns regarding the research on DA, is to appropriately provide mediation which results in an unwillingness to conduct empirical research on DA on the part of scholars. Thus, DA has not been considered as it should be in both general DA literature and literature on L2 DA and it has not received the desired attention (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). There is a general consensus among educational practitioners that the mediation involved in the process of DA can stimulate negotiation in order to co-construct ZPDs, paving the way for the progress of learners (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Poehner, 2009). According to Guk and Kellogg (2007), Vygotsky mainly focused on public school teaching, rejecting the notion of a pedagogical duet between the learner and instructor.

DA is based on Vygotsky's notion of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) which identifies the distance between assisted and independent performance. It refers to the range of tasks that a learner can complete unaidedly. Moreover, it captures the learner's cognitive skills that are being matured. From a Vygotskian perspective, the main goal of education is keeping learners

in their own ZPDs by giving them interesting and culturally meaningful learning and problem-solving tasks reasonably above their level of cognition (Roosevelt, 2008). This requires a deep understanding of learners' individual differences, needs, interests, and learning styles so as to fit the instructional interventions to their needs and requirements. Vygotsky also introduced the notion of size in ZPD by claiming that learners can have larger or smaller zones of proximal development. It refers to the extent to which a learner can benefit from collaboration to improve his/her performance beyond the actual developmental level (Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000). Learners with a larger ZPD size might show better development in response to mediation. Responsiveness to assistance, also, as Vygotsky claims, is an indispensable feature for improving cognitive ability as it provides an insight into the learner's future development.

Different factors might be effective in determining learners' ZPD size or responsiveness to assistance. Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002) claim that different tests might favor individuals from various cultural backgrounds differently. A student's underperformance on a test, thus, might not be due to poor abilities, but rather to the disjunction between his cultural values and those privileged in a test setting. For instance, a student coming from a culture where collaboration is a part of their daily functioning, might benefit more from DA in comparison with a learner who belongs to a culture where individuals have to struggle with their own problems and collaboration is even regarded as cheating. In the same vein, learners' cultural orientations might also affect the amount of feedforward they form in the process of DA. Learners with an individualistic perspective prefer to work independently. Thus, helping others or getting help from the teacher during the test session might seem as cheating to them. On the other hand, students with a collectivist orientation prefer to work with peers and provide and receive assistance when needed.

Innate properties such as birth order and gender can also influence L2 learners' language performance. Gender issues have been shown to affect students' academic achievements, needs, and interests (Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2000). Gender differences have also been studied broadly in the field of SLA, such as performance in exams (Farhady, 1982), L2 acculturation (Tran, 1988), learning strategies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), age and rate of L2 learning (Slavoff & Johnson, 1995), reading strategies (Brantmeier, 2003), and phonology and speaking style (Major, 2004). Many studies have investigated gender differences in L2 learning as a key individual difference variable (e.g. Jiang, 2013; Zafar & Menakshi, 2012). However, all the research examining gender differences on test performance has been conducted using conventional methods and no research has provided an explanation of how gender affects learners' performance on DA. As DA provides examiners with information about each student's approach toward solving a problem, it can fully uncover any gender differences, if it exists at all.

To sum up, in spite of strong arguments in favor of the positive effects of DA, there is a lack of sufficient evidence for its effectiveness in changing the nature of students' intervention programs (Deutsch & Reynolds, 2000; Elliot, 2003; Lauchlan & Elliot, 2001; Yeomans, 2008). Though there is a long history of research literature on individual differences in learning, very few, if any, studies have explored the effect of pre-existing individual differences on post-DA performance. Most of the research regarding DA, has centered around learners' change on DA



and how DA helps to reveal individual differences in learning (e.g., Ajideh & Nourdad, 2013; Murphy, 2011; Resing, Elliott, & Grigorenko, 2012; Resing, Tunteler, De Jong, & Bosma, 2009; Stevenson, Hickendorff, Resing, Heiser, & De Boeck, 2013). In other words, researchers have not sufficiently specified how to make meaningful use of DA in the classroom and how to provide feedback to maximize learning. Besides, they have not exactly specified if DA feedback necessarily leads to the same amount and type of feedforward for all learners with different cultural or demographic features. Considering the learner as constant in the process of DA and neglecting his/her emotions, priorities, orientations, demographic features, it is a gross misrepresentation. It is not yet clear if DA works equally well for boys and girls. Researchers have not fully investigated if students with different cultural dimensions would equally lend themselves to DA intervention and take advantage of the mediations offered by DA assessors. Therefore, this research question was formulated:

RQ: Are there any significant differences among the vocabulary learning of male and female EFL learners with similar cultural dimensions as the result of receiving interactionist dynamic assessment?

METHOD

Participants

Firstly, 120 EFL intermediate adult learners at Shokouh Language Institute in Gonabad were selected based on convenience sampling from among 15 such classes at this institute. Among the participants, 65 were female and 55 were male learners. They were mainly university students and studied intermediate level for the purposes of finding better jobs or achieving higher degrees in their related fields. They were within the age range of 18 -30. Persian was the native language of these students. These learners had all passed their previous English courses at the institute. The courses offered to the participants included and covered major language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) and components (vocabulary and grammar). The vocabulary items included in the course were embedded in the reading content and were usually practiced through gap filling and matching exercises along with occasional multiple choice items. To enter the courses of the institute, learners had to take a placement test (Oxford Placement Test). Following their placement test, the learners would have to attend the classes and pass the final exams given to them after each course. Therefore, the researcher considered the participants studying at the intermediate level at this institute for the purpose of this study.

Instrumentation

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)

Paribakht and Wesche (1993) proposed five levels or stages in the acquisition of individual words in their vocabulary knowledge scale (VKS). The VKS scale rating varied from total unfamiliarity through the recognition of the word and some idea of its meaning to the ability to use the word with grammatical and semantic accuracy in a sentence.

These five levels included:

- I. I do not remember having seen this word before.



- II. I have seen this word before, but I do not know what it means.
- III. I have seen this word before, and I think it means _____. (Synonym or antonym).
- IV. I know this word. It means _____. (Synonym or antonym)
- V. I can use this word in a sentence: _____. (Paribakht, Wesche, 1993, p. 4)

VKS was used as a criterion to select those vocabulary items that learners were unfamiliar with. To this end, 100 vocabulary items chosen from ten units of Vocabulary in Use was given to the learners and they were asked to assign numbers 1,2,3,4 or 5 to the vocabulary items. The five criteria in (VKS) were translated to Persian to remove any chances of ambiguity in this respect. Moreover, the researcher monitored learners while doing the activity to assure that learners were on the right track. Finally, based on the ratings of the students, forty vocabulary items were chosen based on which treatment was carried out. The vocabulary items were those that the learners rated 1 or 2 on the VKS.

Vocabulary Test

To test the subjects' vocabulary knowledge after the treatment session, a vocabulary test was employed. The vocabulary test was devised by the teacher. To this end, the 40 vocabulary items which had been rated 1 or 2 by the participants based on VKS, were included in the test.

In order to assure the validity and reliability of the tests, the following procedures were taken:

Validity: The content validity of the test was ensured via appeal to expert opinion. To this end, the initial pool of test items were reviewed by an MA and a Ph.D. holder in TEFL with a minimum of 15 years of teaching experience. He revised some items. Following that, the construct validity of the test was measured through the employment of a “differential experiment” procedure proposed by Brown (2007). According to this procedure, in order to show the construct validity of a measurement instrument, the instrument could be employed to assess the ability it claimed on two different groups whose ability sounded obviously different in this regard. If the difference between the performances of the two groups proved to be statistically different, it could be concluded that the measurement instrument was assessing what it was supposed to measure and hence it was valid. Based on the aforesaid procedures, the tests were administered to two different groups of learners who were upper-intermediate and advanced students, respectively. The scores obtained by the groups were analyzed using an independent samples T-Test. The analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the results with the advanced students outperforming the upper-intermediate ones, hence, the test proved to be valid.

Reliability: Test-retest procedures were drawn on to assure the reliability of the test. To this end, the test was run twice on the upper-intermediate participants with a time interval of 15 days. Pearson correlation formula was also used to this end, the results of which showed an acceptable reliability index of 0.82.

The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 test was also used to confirm the internal consistency of the test. This statistical test checked the internal consistency of instruments with dichotomous choices. The test statistic was:

$$\rho_{KR20} = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{j=1}^k p_j q_j}{\sigma^2} \right)$$

where

k = number of questions

p_j = number of people in the sample who answered question j correctly

q_j = number of people in the sample who didn't answer question j correctly

σ^2 = variance of the total scores of all the people taking the

To this end, the reliability of the vocabulary test turned out to be .86 which was at a satisfactory level (Brown, 2007).

Intermediate Vocabulary in Use

English Vocabulary in Use is a family of self-study and classroom texts for vocabulary development. The books follow a successful format of English Grammar in Use titles with presentation of new vocabulary on the left-hand pages and practice exercises on the facing right-hand pages. This book contained one hundred units covering vocabulary on different topics e.g., sightseeing, hotel, airport, crime, family members, and others.

Cultural Dimensions Questionnaire

The cultural dimension questionnaire used in the present study was the one developed by Saboori (2015). The questionnaire had 26 items on a 4-point Likert-scale which measured 6 dimensions of culture including:

- Power Distance (Items: 8, 12, 14, 15)
- Individualism/Collectivism (Items: 3, 9, 13, 16, 17)
- Masculinity/ Femininity (Items: 10, 19, 23, 24, 25)
- Uncertainty avoidance (Items: 2, 5, 6, 26)
- Long/short term Orientation (Items: 1, 4, 7, 11)
- Indulgence/Restraint (Items: 18, 20, 21, 22).

As stated by Saboori (2015), the instrument enjoyed a satisfactory level of validity and reliability. This instrument was given to the participants and the learners who had the highest scores for each of the dimensions were considered to be oriented towards that dimension more.

Procedure

Initially, 120 adult EFL intermediate learners at Shokuh Language Institute in Gonabad were selected based on convenience sampling from among 15 such classes. The cultural dimension questionnaire was given to the participants to identify their cultural orientations. The number of participants along with their cultural orientations are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Participants along with Their Cultural Orientations

Cultural Dimension	Male	Female
Power Distance	7	11
Individualism/Collectivism	9	9
Masculinity/ Femininity	8	13
Uncertainty avoidance	14	15
Long-short term Orientation	8	7
Indulgence Restraint	9	10



After identifying the cultural orientations of the learners, The VKS proposed by Wesche and Paribakht (1993) was translated into Persian and learners were asked to rate the vocabulary items in a 100-vocabulary list based on the scale. The rationale behind this procedure was to select the vocabulary items that learners were not familiar with. Since the students' familiarity with the words would distort the effect of dynamic assessment, the following procedures were adopted for the purposes of the study. First, 40 vocabulary items were chosen. The vocabulary items were those that the participants rated 1 or 2 on the VKS; 1 meaning "I do not remember having seen this word before" and 2 meaning "I have seen this word before, but I do not know what it means".

Ten sessions were determined for teaching these 40 selected words to all learners. All groups were taught these vocabulary items using the *Vocabulary in Use* book. To this end, the following steps were taken in the experimental group. Initially, the teacher briefly explained the dynamic assessment to the students and provided some examples. Then, to administer the dynamic assessment, the instructor went through the following 7 stages:

- The 4 vocabulary items corresponding to the unit under instruction -out of the initial 40 words- were written on the board. Learners were first encouraged to guess the meaning of the words based on the context that the teacher provided orally for them.
- The teacher tried to focus the participants' attention on different word parts such as prefixes or suffixes (if there were any) to find the right meaning.
- The instructor asked the students to identify any synonyms or antonyms of new words.
- Learners were asked to work in pairs and use each word in a sentence based on their guesses.
- Four corresponding definitions of the words under instruction were given to the learners in a jumbled manner. The participants were required to match them to the corresponding definitions.
- The answers were checked and students were assisted in comprehending the meaning of the words.
- The students were put into pairs. One student read the definitions and the other one was required to come up with the correct corresponding word. Then, they changed the role for the next word.

The aforesaid procedures were taken drawing on the ZPD's concept of "step by step" learning. This teaching course was developed in a way so as to fulfill this purpose. That is, the instructor first started with the first step and moved thoroughly to the other stages by the time participants had been able to learn the words and use them in sentences appropriately. Having finished the 10 sessions in which the 40 unknown words were covered, the 40 item vocabulary test devised by the researcher was administered to the groups to test their vocabulary performances.

RESULTS

The present study aimed to discover any significant differences among the vocabulary learning of male and female EFL learners with similar cultural dimensions as the result of receiving interactionist dynamic assessment. To find the answer to this research question, independent



samples of t-test was run on the vocabulary scores of the male and female learners with similar cultural dimensions after the treatment. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with power distance cultural dimension.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with power distance cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	PD Group MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male female Power Distance	Male	7	16.7143	1.60357	0.60609
	Female	11	16.8182	2.04050	0.61523

Table 3 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with power distance cultural dimension.

Table 3. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with power distance cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Male female Power Distance	Equal variances assumed	.241	.630	-.11	16	.911	-.10390	.91309	-2.039	1.831
	Equal variances not assumed			-.12	15.110	.906	-.10390	.86363	-1.943	1.7357



As the above table indicates, the sig value equals 0.91, which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with power distance cultural dimension.

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Individualism/Collectivism cultural dimension.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Individualism-Collectivism cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	IC Group MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male Female Individualism Collectivism	Male	9	28.6667	6.50000	2.16667
	Female	9	27.7778	6.94222	2.31407

Table 5 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants through a cultural dimension.

Table 5. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Individualism-Collectivism cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Male Female Individualism Collectivism	Equal variances assumed	.005	.947	.280	16	.783	.88889	3.17008	-5.831	7.60915
	Equal variances not assumed			.280	15.931	.783	.88889	3.17008	-5.833	7.61151

As seen in the table above, the sig value equals 0.78 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with Individualism/Collectivism cultural dimension.

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Masculinity/Femininity cultural dimension.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Masculinity/Femininity cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	MF Group MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male female Masculinity Femininity	Male	8	18.1250	1.55265	.54894
	Female	13	25.1538	4.20012	1.16490

Table 7 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Masculinity/Femininity cultural dimension.

Table 7. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Masculinity/Femininity cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper

Male female Masculinity Femininity	Equal variances assumed	9.985	.755	-4.51	19	.000	-7.028	1.55856	-10.29	-3.766
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.45	16.524	.000	-7.028	1.28777	-9.75	-4.30

As noticed in the above table, the sig value equals 0.00 which is lower than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was a significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with Masculinity/Femininity cultural dimension. Since the mean scores for the female participants are higher than that of male learners (See Table 6), it can be concluded that female learners with masculinity/femininity dimension outperformed the male learners.

Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Uncertainty Avoidance cultural dimension.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Uncertainty Avoidance cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	MF Group MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male female Uncertainty Avoidance	Male	14	12.4286	3.03098	.81006
	Female	15	12.8000	2.75681	.71181



Table 9 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Uncertainty Avoidance cultural dimension.

Table 9. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Uncertainty Avoidance cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Male female Uncertainty Avoidance	Equal variances assumed	.491	.489	-.34	27	.732	-.37143	1.07472	-2.5765	1.83372
	Equal variances not assumed			-.34	26.278	.733	-.37143	1.07836	-2.5868	1.84404

As shown in the table above, the sig value equals 0.73 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with Uncertainty Avoidance.

Table 10 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Long short term cultural dimension.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Long short term cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	LS Groups MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male-female Long terms short term	Male	8	19.8750	4.48609	1.58607
	Female	7	20.0000	4.79583	1.81265

Table 11 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with long short-term cultural dimension.

Table 11. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Long short term cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Male female Long terms short term	Equal variances assumed	.045	.835	-.052	13	.959	-.12500	2.39709	~	5.05360
	Equal variances not assumed			-.052	12.449	.959	-.12500	2.40860	~	5.10195

As shown in the table above, the sig value equals 0.95 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with Long short term cultural orientation. Table 12 displays the descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with a cultural dimension.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores for the male and female participants with Indulgence restraint cultural dimension

Group Statistics					
	IR Groups MF	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male female Indulgence restraint	Male	9	23.2760	5.50000	1.83333
	Female	10	23.0000	6.05530	1.91485

Table 13 displays the results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Indulgence Restraint cultural dimension.

Table 13. Results of independent samples t-test for the male and female participants with Indulgence restraint cultural dimension

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Male female	Indulgence restraint	.112	.915	.000	17	.923	.276	2.66520	-5.623	5.623
	Equal variances assumed									
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	16.996	.923	.276	2.65100	-5.593	5.593

As seen in the table above, the sig value equals 0.92 which is higher than the confidence level of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the vocabulary scores of the male and female participants with Indulgence restraint cultural orientation.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at discovering any significant differences among the vocabulary learning of male and female EFL learners with similar cultural dimensions as the result of receiving interactionist dynamic assessment. The results of independent samples t-test revealed that there were no significant differences between the performances of the female and male learners with similar cultural dimensions. However, it was found that female learners with masculinity/femininity dimension outperformed the male learners on the vocabulary test.

In the current study, it was found that there were no significant differences between the performances of the female and male learners with similar cultural dimensions. This finding can be justified based on Hofstede (1980). As Hofstede notes, both women and men tend to be ambitious and competitive. Rojjanaprapayon (1997) concluded that masculinity in all cultures cannot be characterized as that defined by Hofstede, which is in line with the Western concept of masculinity (assertiveness, aggressiveness, and goal orientation). The results showed that Thais may turn out to be very aggressive and goal oriented in some situations, yet they are expected to be attentive, supportive, and yielding.

In the current study, it was found that female learners with masculinity/femininity dimension outperformed the male learners on the vocabulary test. Hofstede named those cultures that seek a maximal distinction between what women and men are expected to do as masculine. In a study conducted by Hofstede (1980), the results showed that there was less variation in women's social role than that of men across the cultures. He named those cultures that seek a maximal distinction between what women and men are expected to do as masculine. Those cultures that highly value masculine traits put emphasis on assertiveness, competition, and material success. Those categorized as feminine cultures allow for more overlapping social



roles for the sexes. Cultures that put emphasis on feminine traits emphasize the quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and care for the weak.

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