Suwan Kim
Korea

Arab Culture Education Using a Soap Opera: Focus on the Application of the Methodology of Ethnography of Communication¹

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Abstract

This article aimed to suggest implications of learner-centered culture education through observation, participant observation, interviewing or ethnoscience in particular. Korean Arabic language learners were asked to watch two episodes of an Arab soap opera and compare and contrast their own culture from Arab culture based on what they had watched. Results of this study showed a desirable direction, from insiders' perspectives, for culture education utilizing the methodology of ethnography of communication. In order to establish Korean learners' cultural identities as well as to equip them with cross-cultural competence through which they can appropriately, accurately behave depending on situational context, this methodology of ethnography of communication into Arab culture educational practice should be made in the future.

Keywords: *ethnography of communication, Arab culture education, ethnoscience, participant observation*

Introduction

There has been a rising demand for the Arabic language in Korea. The importance of the Arabic language is already apparent – it is one of the six official

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languages of the United Nations (UN).² In Korea, a need for Arabic language education emerged due to the first and second oil crisis. Now it is one of the foreign languages on the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), being the most popular subject out of all the other foreign languages among test-takers. In this atmosphere wherein needs for diverse approaches to culture education are mounting in Arabic education, this study aims to compare and contrast cultures of language learners and of the target language utilizing a soap opera as a tool. Also, effective teaching methods using language in culture education are investigated by implementing the methodology of ethnography of communication based on the principle of participant observation.

Research Problem

Korea is facing unprecedented demand for Arabic instruction and an increasing number of the Korean population desires to learn Arabic in order to keep up with this trend. Hence, research on Arab culture education that is in tune with the needs of the language learners and of the current generation is imminent.³ As the communicative approach came to the center in the field of foreign language teaching, there have been movements in Arabic language education that put emphasis on culture education in an attempt to develop the cultural knowledge as well as linguistic knowledge of the target language for effective communication.

In order to effectively communicate in a target language, the language learner needs to be knowledgeable about the internal elements, not only external elements, of the target language. It means that knowledge of the Arabs' sociocultural identities is a prerequisite to truly understand Arab culture and to reach one's desired levels of communication in Arabic. In this context, sociocultural aspects are being greatly emphasized in language education, culture education methodologies that teach cultures in a direct manner such as Inter-cultural Approach, Ethnography of Communication, or Language and Culture Integration have been introduced

² The languages that Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) acknowledged as official languages are Japanese, German, Portuguese, and Korean as well as the six official languages of the UN that are English, French, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic.

³ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Current Statistic of Arabic language learners* (as of April 1, 2015)

Year	1999	2011	2013	2015
Number of Students	760	1014	1236	1327

Current Statistic of CSAT-taker(Arabic language) (as of Oct. 2016)

Year	2006	2010	2014	2016
Number of CSAT- takers	5,072	49,116	12,356	65,153

to the Arabic language teaching field. According to Kim (2008), using the ethnography of communication approach is one of the most effective ways of teaching target cultures that a language educator can implement in language education. It is the best way of increasing learning efficiency, requiring learners to observe and record their own verbal behavior.

This article intends to suggest implications of learner-centered culture education through observation, participant observation, interviewing or ethnoscience in particular. To do this, language learners were asked to watch two episodes of a soap opera and to compare and contrast their own culture from Arab culture based on what they had watched. This effective way of learning culture can be implemented in a form of the methodology of ethnography of communication such as observation or participant observation in processing the differences between their own culture and Arab culture that they found from watching the episodes.

Diverse Approaches in Culture Education

In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn suggested concepts of 'culture' in 162 different ways based on the existing literature at that time. 50 years later, it was reorganized by other scholars working on culture, who suggested more than 300 definitions of it. This phenomenon in which the number of the definitions of culture has doubled in 50 years indicates that culture has been identified in a various way depending on varied views or approaches (Kim, 2008: 46). Kim (2001: 86) states that although there is no hierarchy among worldviews or cultures, people often experience misunderstanding, frustration, anxiety or repulsion in their communication process. This reality is inevitable in the process of cross-cultural communication.

Research Methodology

In the current Arabic teaching context, it is not easy to experience cultural differences by actually staying in or experiencing Arab culture for a long period of time. Therefore, videos were used in order to explore cultural differences between language learners' own culture and Arab culture. To examine these cultural differences, methods of observation, participant observation, interviewing, and ethnoscience were implemented. Through these methods, it was found that cultural misunderstandings and conflicts decreased and learners themselves participated in the observation process, which consequently led to learner-centered culture education.

This study aimed to explore experiential culture education in which learners themselves participate and examine differences from their own culture by watching videos. Learners were put in groups to watch videos in this experiment. After watching them, they were asked to discuss their perceptions from the video watching in relation to cultural differences and to summarize what they had discussed in groups. Those group summaries were then shared in the whole class. Finally, the learners were able to discern errors from their own misunderstandings of Arab culture through the methodology of ethnography of communication, which enabled them to participate in the process of measuring the validity and reliability of their own observations.

Group Activities Utilizing a Soap Opera

Participants in this study were divided into two groups: Group A consisted of 89 freshmen, who had studied Arabic less than a year in six Arabic language departments at five different universities. Group B consisted of 82 students from sophomores to juniors, who had studied Arabic more than one to less than three years at the same departments as Group A.

The videos used in this study were episodes from '*Ashwak Na'em*', a Syrian soap opera. Two episodes from the show that were thought to naturally present Arab culture and conversation in everyday life were selected. The rationale for the selection of this soap opera was as follows: each episode was 15-minute long and thus it was not difficult to watch; it included a great deal of elements of daily life culture despite exaggeration of characters to some extent; and it dealt with actual conflicts of young generation that had been major issues in Arab societies. The procedure of this class is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Procedure and contents

Procedure	Contents
Video Watch	Watching episodes #17 and #20 of <i>Ashwak Na'em</i> .
Discussion	Discussing each individual's perceptions of cultural differences in groups
Presentation	Presenting each group's summary of group discussion and comparing learners' own cultures from Arab culture.
Questions & Answers	Asking questions about what they have presented and listening to an Arab professor's explanation of Arab cultural backgrounds
Assignment & Activities	Given a further assignment and activities using the methodology of ethnography of communication in order to participate in and observe cultural differences

After watching episodes #17 and #20 of *Ashwak Na'em* and briefly summarizing the stories, the learners were asked which points of cultural differences they had paid particular attention to. The cultural differences based on the learners' perceptions that were clarified later by the Arab professor during the discussion are all presented. The brief summaries of two episodes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of episodes

episode #17	<p>– Mara's father happens to see Mara greeting her cousin Maryam, who is with a male student, and scold her for it. Mara's mother and her neighbor lady comfort Mara. Mara complains that she cannot understand her father.</p> <p>– Riah, a high school student, falls in love with her Chemistry teacher and tries to be closer to him on the excuse of her study. Her friends make fun of her because of this situation.</p>
episode #20	<p>– When Mara and Riah are listening to music together, their father comes into the room and says that they are supposed to open the door when there are just two of them in the room. Two sisters feel suffocated.</p> <p>– In a Philosophy class, the teacher and students talk about 'love'.</p> <p>– Teachers in the school check students' uniforms and scold a few students who do not conform to the rules of the school regarding uniforms.</p>

Group A:

· I do not understand why Mara has to be beaten only because she greeted her (male) cousin.

- I think Arab society is way more conservative than Korean society.
- I feel frustrated that what a mother can do when her daughter is scolded by her father is merely comforting her daughter.
- Arab society seems to be considerably patriarchal.
- A girl trying to express her love for her teacher looks the same both in Arab society and Korea.
- When they talk about love, the teacher's saying that love to 'Allah'⁴ is important is impressive to me.
- It was surprising to see the culture of wearing shoes indoors exists in Arab society, not only in Western societies.
- It is amazing that even high school students already have a designated person to marry.
- Fathers in Korea nowadays respect their children's opinions. On the contrary, it looks like fathers' opinions play a key role in Arab society.

⁴ الله in Arabic. This term refers to God in Islam.

- It is impossible to happen in Korea that a father scolds his teenage daughter because of her listening to music.
- Arab women dress more freely than I thought they would. I thought all women in Arab society would wear hijab.

Group B:

- The patriarchal aspects of Arab society will hinder its development.
- I could sense that Arab and Korean people shared a similar sentiment when watching the teenage Arab girl getting excited by a soccer game.
- As a way of greeting, Arab people repeat the greeting words over and over. It shows that hospitality is an important element in Arab culture.
- It felt positive that Arab women were actively engaged in social activities.
- I can see that Islam resonates with overall lives of Arabs as seen from numerous expressions including 'Allah', which wish God's blessings.
- Arab people actively express themselves using a great deal of body language when talking to one another.
- Arabs tend to exaggerate things.
- Interests of the teens are the same in Korea and Arab countries.
- It was impressive that the Arab woman proactively expressed her love for the married man. This differed from conservative features of Arab society that had been traditionally portrayed from outside.
- In Arab countries, it is possible for one to marry his/her cousin. I still do not understand this point but think it is a part of their culture.

In group A's responses in relation to cultural differences, it is demonstrated that they strongly reacted to the limited gender roles of women in Arab society. Also, they were interested in the social phenomenon of arranged marriage. Especially those who had not been much exposed to Arab culture expressed their surprise when seeing the Arab father's punishment using force towards his children. They were unfamiliar with and strongly disgusted by seeing young generation struggling with their relationships with the elder and succumbing to authority figures that used force.

Group B showed cultural maturity that acknowledges the male-dominated aspects of Arab society as well as compares those aspects with other cultural features of Korean society. Also, they were able to describe sociocultural customs and features such as long greeting words, a tendency to exaggerate or Arab's love for soccer in a detailed manner.

In the process of finding cultural differences, it is clearly seen that Group B had a much shorter list of cultural differences than Group A. Moreover, Group

B showed a much more positive and active attitude toward the target culture as well as willingness to understand it. Group A and B came to develop deeper knowledge about Arab culture by sharing each group's different thoughts. Overall, all the learners were satisfied with this learning method in which they watched a soap opera and explored cultural differences. To encourage them to have a new understanding of different cultures through their own observation of cultural differences, this study implements the methodology of ethnography of communication.

Discussion

Culture Education Using the Methodology of Ethnography of Communication

Language is a part of a culture; therefore, in order for successful communication at the native-speaker level to take place, one needs to understand sociocultural phenomena of the target culture. Furthermore, the difference between learning *about a culture* and learning *a culture* is equivalent to that of obtaining knowledge of a target language and obtaining a target language itself – learning a culture differs from learning *about a culture*. In that sense, adapting the methodology of ethnography of communication in foreign language education is crucial; it helps learners to measure their own culture and enhances their cross-cultural competence of the target language, comparing their own and the target cultures (Han, 1999: 354).

To lessen conflicts and shocks from cultural differences and expand learners' cultural knowledge, a lot of time and energy is required from learners. The methodology of ethnography of communication will help learners to reduce the time devoted to the process of approaching diverse cultures of their target languages. Furthermore, learners will become aware of their own bias that they used to have toward the target culture. It will eventually facilitate learners' cultural knowledge of the target language.

Culture Education through Observation and Participant Observation

This study also investigated culture education based on the methodology of ethnography of communication in order for learners to identify the cultural differences they found while watching the videos and to develop their cultural acquisition abilities. Ethnography of communication was first suggested by Hymes (1962), when he published *the ethnography of speaking*. It refers to the study of

the way that consists of a part of culture system and focuses on categorization of communicative behaviors related to other compositional elements of the system.

Table 3. Contents and activities of observation & participant observation

Method	Contents
Observation & Participant-Ob-servation	<p>* Observation of Arab culture</p> <p><Suggestions></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Visit Arab families residing in Korea and experience the relationships within the families in person. 2) Meet Arab college students studying in Korea and have a conversation on interests of teens or people in their twenties. 3) Meet Arab people of varied age range and observe their communication styles. <p><Assignment></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did the relationships in the Arab family from the videos you watched look like? 2. What were the reactions of children to adults' scolding in the Arab family? What types of expressions and behaviors were mainly used? 3. Based on your encounter with Arab college students, what are the most attention-getting topics among the teens and people in their twenties?
<Activities>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learners participate in and observe customs, expressions, and behaviors of Arab culture. Afterwards, they make an analysis of the features of Arab culture by comparing and contrasting them with Korean culture and record it on an observation note. 2. After researching universality and particularity of Arab culture that learners have experienced based on group observation, learners have a discussion and give a presentation on their research results. 3. Learners make situational dramas and perform them in groups. 	

As learners interpret situations in their own way with their own perspectives, there is a lot of room for misunderstandings of cultural differences that they find while watching short films.⁵ After learners experience the indirect way of culture observation through watching videos, a process to confirm validity of the observation is necessary. Related assignments can be either handed out as homework or suggested before a class starts and learners give a presentation on their observations at the end of the semester.

⁵ Introspection is a crucial method in the methodology of ethnography of communication in order to see learners' perceived culture in an objective way. Although learners are sure that they know the type of language use or culture of their own language communities, it is necessary for their assumptions developed by their senses to be reflected by others' senses. In this sense, introspection is often used with observation (Wang, Baek, Lee & Kim, 2009: 151)

Culture Education through Interviewing

Table 4. Contents and activities of interviewing

Method	Contents
Interviewing	<p><Suggestions></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Do research on unique features of family relationships in Arab communities. 2) Compare social Arab culture phenomenon of respecting seniors or using the honorific to the elder with those in Korea. Find differences and similarities. 3) Find marriage customs in Arab. <p><Assignment></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask some questions about casual relationships between parents and children in Arab families. 2. Ask some questions about the main causes of conflicts between parents and children. 3. Ask some questions about common behaviors or expressions toward elders in Arab society.
	<p><Activities></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make open-ended questions, not multiple-choice. 2. Make a note on new observations and verbal expressions that you have come across through the interviewing process (using a recorder or other equipment is allowed). 3. Compare each group's interview results by presenting them to the whole class.

Interviewing is a great way of developing the concept of relativity in learners. In the process of gathering data and analyzing the target language and culture, learners are required to open their doors to new thoughts, information or formats that emerge and to the gap between 'ideal' and 'actual' cultures that are reflected in statements or behaviors of the target culture (Wang, Baek, Lee & Kim 2009:156). Through making questionnaires and talking to interviewees, learners are able to realize existing cultural gaps between their own culture and the target culture. Eventually, this interviewing process will lead them to gain an insight into the concept of relativity while asking questions and getting answers.

Culture Education through Ethnoscience

Table 5. Contents and activities of ethnoscience

Method	Contents
Ethnoscience	<p><Suggestions></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Using proverbs, understand differences of cultural phenomena and world-views in Arab culture. 2) Find some verbal expressions that Arab people often use when greeting and compare them with Korean culture 3) Find some verbal expressions regarding the way people address one another (family members, acquaintances, etc.) <p><Assignment></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do research on the titles by which one addresses his/her relatives in Arab and Korea, respectively. Afterwards, think about what centers on human relationships in Arab society. 2. Identify how varied emphasis points in expressions depend on situations when people greet one another and make a list of the vocabulary used in those expressions. Also, identify each context where different greeting expressions are used according to interlocutors' gender or age. 3. Find Arab proverbs in relation to saving face or gaining honor and compare those with Korean proverbs. <hr/> <p><Activities></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When giving a presentation, use PowerPoint with tables so that your audience can see the cultural differences being presented at a glance. 2. Align Arabic expressions with commonly used Korean expressions in the same situations and compare them. 3. Include both external and internal perspectives of looking at the cultural differences being presented.

Ethnoscience, which is often called ethnosemantics, refers to a way of studying cultural domains focusing on how native speakers of a certain society use their language as a tool of symbolization process. Ethnoscience approach cultures from internal perspectives and examine cultures through a lens of language use. This is based on the belief that people express their own world using language as a means and explore how they are analyzing their experiential world by observing their patterns of using language (Frake 1962: 59). Ethnoscience enables learners to look into their target cultures from insiders' point of view, which may solve their doubts. Furthermore, it leads them to understand universality and particularity of culture and foster positive, mature attitudes toward their target cultures.

Conclusions

This study explored cultural differences between learners' own culture and their target language culture using a soap opera and showed a desirable direction from insiders' perspectives for culture education utilizing the methodology of ethnography of communication. Based on participant observation, the methodology of ethnography of communication is a way of recording how members of a community live, how they interact, how they behave, or what they believe in in a detailed manner (Kim, 2008: 136). Therefore, implementing this method into educational practice inevitably requires a great deal of time. Yet, there is no doubt that it would be an effective way of culture education as learners themselves select cultural differences through watching a soap opera and observe the differences of their interests.

The methodology of ethnography of communication is an ethnographic approach aiming at a target language. It is an effective method of teaching both language and culture. Watching a soap opera, learners were able to explore such elements of Arab culture as patriarchal customs in Arab families, the spread of love marriage instead of arranged marriage, gender role change of women, concerns and interests of Arab youngsters, etc. Learners succeed in culture education when they understand Arab culture by observing it in person and learning its verbal behaviors – this is a key to natural, ideal culture education.

Overall, the methodology of ethnography of communication is suitable for culture education in the sense that various ways of culture education that can be integrated with language education are urgent nowadays. In order to communicate using the target language and to have a proper knowledge of Korean, language education may consider implementing the methodology of ethnography of communication.

To conclude, this study has explored culture education methods using observation, participant observation, interviewing, and ethnoscience approaches in the context of the methodology of ethnography of communication. Consistent efforts to implement the methodology of ethnography of communication into Arab culture educational practice should be made in order to establish learners' cultural identities as well as to equip them with cross-cultural competence through which they can appropriately, accurately behave depending on situational contexts.

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