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Tatiana Szczygłowska: Gender and learning target-language culture: A study with Polish students of English
Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány, XVIII. évfolyam, 2018/2. szám
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.18460/ANY.2018.2.003>

Gender and learning target-language culture: A study with Polish students of English

Im Beitrag wird dem Einfluss des Geschlechts auf die Einstellungen und Präferenzen von Englisch lernenden polnischen Studierenden in Bezug auf die Zielsprachenkultur nachgegangen. Die Einstellungen zur Aneignung der Zielsprachenkultur werden unter vier Aspekten untersucht: Sie betreffen das Konzept der Kultur, die Erwartungen der Studierenden gegenüber dem Erlernen der Zielsprachenkultur, ihre Präferenzen bezüglich des Erlernens von spezifischen Elementen der Zielsprachenkultur, sowie der unterschiedlichen Wege dieses Lernprozesses. Die Analyse erschließt statistisch signifikative Unterschiede zwischen Männern und Frauen, insofern sich Letztere mehr Sorgen machen um die Aneignung der Zielsprachenkultur.

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is inseparably linked with developing target-language (TL) cultural knowledge, largely because “language is a component of culture”, which it reflects and transmits (Young, et al., 2009: 150). Having insight into a language’s culture is thus considered as vital to a full grasp of the language’s shades of meaning, hence, foreign language learners inevitably become learners of the TL culture. McKay (2002: 86) also suggests that cultural information acts as a prime motivator for students, to whom the sounds and forms of a language seem abstract if they are not related to real people, behaviours or places. Therefore, language scholars and educators strive for integrating culture into foreign language learning methodologies (see e.g. Byram, 1991; Kramsch, 1993 and 1998; Levy, 2007; Byrnes, 2010). What, however, causes concern is the intricacy of the very concept of culture, which has numerous yet disparate definitions that mention its diverse visible and invisible manifestations. Still, the conceptions that prevail in the context of language pedagogy consistently stress that “language does not exist in a vacuum, so language learners should be aware of the [cultural] context in which the target language is used” (Genc & Bada, 2005: 78). Indeed, learning to communicate with others in the studied language is only partly dependent on one’s knowledge of the target linguistic system. What seems to be even more fundamental is the access one gains to the meanings constructed in the language, which is possible through learning about its culture.

It cannot, however, be forgotten that learners’ engagement with TL culture, just like their general interest in learning, is not something that is given and the same for everybody. As Skelton and Allen (1999: 4) argue, it is just the opposite, since “any one individual’s experience of culture will be affected by the multiple

aspects of their identity – race, gender, sex, age, sexuality, class, caste position, religion, geography, and so forth”. In this paper, attention is focused specifically on gender and its effect on English majors’ approach to learning TL culture. Actually, there exist contradictory opinions on the significance of gender in second/foreign language education. For instance, Sunderland (1994: 211) states that “in much writing and thinking on English language and teaching, gender appears nowhere”. Similarly, Nyikos (2008: 73) contends that “gender is often neglected as a variable in language learning”, and yet she presents a comprehensive overview of research into this matter. By contrast, Llach and Gallego (2012: 47) assert that “gender is one of the most relevant factors used in SLA¹ research to distinguish among learners” and refer to studies dealing with gender differences in various areas of language pedagogy. Yet, even though it seems that recently “the body of work on gender in second and foreign language education” has become “large and wide-ranging”, material from developing countries, including Eastern Europe is still sparse and needs further attention (Sunderland, 2000: 203; 221).

One particular research aspect that should be explored is “the causal relationship between language learning and teaching and culture learning in the form of insights and attitudes”, since it “has been researched [...] sparingly”, as Byram and Feng (2004: 151) maintain. There is little doubt that learner’s beliefs, attitudes and expectations about various aspects of foreign language pedagogy influence its effectiveness and are thus seen as an important factor worthy of empirical exploration (see e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2012). Indeed, eliciting students’ views on foreign language learning and teaching may contribute to a better understanding of what, why and how they do as well as are prepared to do as language learners. This seems to be relevant also in the context of learning TL culture, especially that, as Prodromou (1992) claims, the acquisition of a language is influenced by the attitudes learners hold towards its culture, and supposedly also towards the learning of this culture. Therefore, the aim of foreign language pedagogy that cannot be ignored is the development of “positive attitudes to foreign language learning and to speakers of foreign languages and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations” (Byram, Morgan and colleagues, 1994: 15). This, however, is hard to achieve without systematic monitoring of how learners conceive of the learning process. Thus, to cast some light on the relationship between gender, learners’ attitudes and TL culture learning, this paper presents the results of a survey designed to elicit the views of advanced male and female learners of English on what they consider to be an optimal configuration of aspects for their study of TL culture.

¹ SLA refers to Second Language Acquisition

2. The study

Situated in a Polish university context, the study explores the effect of gender on English majors' perceptions of various aspects of culture learning and teaching in relation to the studied language. The following research questions are addressed:

- (1) What is the participants' idea of culture, also in relation to the realm of the studied foreign language?
- (2) What are their beliefs and expectations about learning TL culture?
- (3) What are their preferences for learning about specific TL cultural elements?
- (4) What are their preferences for different ways of learning TL culture?

2.1 Participants

The participants were 234 full-time students of English at a Polish state university who already completed basic courses in the culture, history and literature of selected Anglophone countries, mostly the UK and the USA. 158 were enrolled in a 3-year BA program and 76 were enrolled in a 2-year MA program. When the study was conducted, 225 of the students were in the 19-26 age group and the remaining 9 were aged 27 and above. As shown in Table 1, there were more than twice as many female as male respondents, which is largely due to gender preferences for certain fields of study (see MNiSW, 2013: 18).

Table 1. Distribution of participants by gender.

Men	Women	TOTAL
67	167	234
28,63%	71,37%	100%

2.2 Data collection and analysis

To collect the data, a questionnaire in English was administered during the classes. 20 minutes were allowed to complete background questions about gender, age, year of study, and main survey items, which were arranged in four parts. Part A consisted of two multiple choice questions about the idea of culture, also in relation to the realm of the studied language. Part B comprised 10 items regarding personal beliefs and expectations about learning TL culture. Part C focused on the preferences for learning about 27 distinct TL cultural elements. Part D centred on the preferences for 12 different ways of learning TL culture.

In Part A, there were three response alternatives for the first multiple choice question and six for the second question. The other items followed a five-point Likert scale format. In Parts B and D, (dis)agreement with given items was sought on a scale ranging from 5 – strongly agree to 1 – strongly disagree. The preferences in Part C were determined using a forced choice scale ranging from 5 – very important to 1 – not important. The neutral response alternative was removed, as the considered cultural elements are included in the curriculum, which forces the learners to adopt a definite attitude to them.

The results were analyzed with respect to the number of participants choosing a particular answer in relation to their gender. Each item was analyzed by calculating the frequencies of the response alternatives (Part A) and of the five Lickert scale responses (Parts B, C and D), which were then collapsed into three categories (i.e. 1/2, 3, 4/5 for each respective scale), computing their percentages and, if applicable, mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*). Additionally, in the case of Lickert-scale items, the statistical significance of differences between male and female subjects was assessed using two-sample Welch's unequal variances *t*-test ($\alpha = 0.05$). To evaluate the practical significance of differences, Cohen's *d* was used as a measure of effect size, the reporting of which allows the description of mean differences independently of sample size. Following Hattie's (2009) recommendation for education, the following reference values were used: *d* = 0.2 small, 0.4 medium, 0.6 large.

3. Results and analysis

The participants' responses are presented in four sections below, each exploring a different aspect of learning TL culture. There are provided numerical values for the whole sample and separately for male (M) and female (F) subjects. For convenience, the items in Parts B, C and D have been arranged in descending order of total mean value.

3.1 Part A: the idea of culture

Part A investigated the participants' conception of culture, both in general terms and in relation to the studied language. In Tables 2 and 3 there are shown the percentages of responses to the multiple-choice alternatives provided for the two items.

Table 2. General idea of culture.

1) As part of your concept of culture, do you associate it:			
	a) mainly with HIGH culture	b) mainly with LOW culture	c) with both HIGH and LOW culture
Total	15.54%	20.18%	64.28%
M	20.9%	19.4%	59.7%
F	10.18%	20.96%	68.86%

As shown in Table 2, high culture was indicated the least frequently (15.54%) whereas low culture was slightly more popular (20.18%), considering the whole sample. In fact, the students most willingly conceive of culture as comprising both high and low elements (64.28%). Calculating the results separately for the variable of gender, it can be seen that this trend was stronger among female (68.86%) than male respondents (59.7%). As for the choice of low culture, the differences between men and women were only minute, with a slight advantage

of the latter (20.96%) over the former (19.4%). Yet, high culture was indicated much more readily by male (20.9%) than female respondents (10.18%).

Table 3. Idea of the primary culture of the studied foreign language.

2) Which of the following do you consider as the primary culture of the L1 English-speaking world, one you believe you should learn in English classes?					
	American	British	Irish	Canadian	mixed
Total	24.06%	72.35%	1.05%	0.3%	British & American ⇒ 1.94% British & Irish ⇒ 0.3%
M	31.35%	65.67%	1.49%	---	British & American ⇒ 1.49%
F	16.77%	79.04%	0.6%	0.6%	British & American ⇒ 2.39% British & Irish ⇒ 0.6%

As shown in Table 3, the most willingly indicated was British culture (72.35%), followed by the American one (24.06%). Considerably less popular were Irish (1.05%) and Canadian (0.3%) cultures. No one pointed to the culture of Australia or other English-speaking countries, yet quite a few opted for a mixture of British and American (1.94%) or even British and Irish cultures (0.3%).

Dichotomising the data according to gender, it can be seen that female respondents are more fervent proponents of British culture (79.04%) than the male ones (65.67%). Even more substantial is the difference between men and women for whom American culture is the primary one of the English-speaking world, with the former being more convinced of this (31.35%) than the latter (16.77%). Similarly, Irish culture, though only minimally popular, was indicated more frequently by male (1.49%) than female respondents (0.6%), yet these were women, not men, some of whom pointed to Canadian culture (0.6%). Women also proved to be quite diverse in their choices, as they indicated six different response alternatives, including two mixed ones.

3.2 Part B: beliefs and expectations about learning TL culture

Part B explored the participants' beliefs (Q3 to Q8) and expectations (Q1, Q2, Q9, Q10) as to learning TL culture. In Tables 4 and 5 there are shown descriptive statistics as well as the percentages of responses to the Likert-scale items in the 'agree' (A), 'undecided' (U) and 'disagree' (D) categories.

Table 4. Beliefs about learning TL culture.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Variable</i>	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
5) Cultural awareness is necessary for a thorough communicative competence in the TL <i>M</i> = 3.99 <i>SD</i> = 0.80	M	7.46	17.91	74.63	3.91	0.84
	F	3	20.36	76.64	4.02	0.78
4) Learning the target culture is an indispensable part of learning the TL <i>M</i> = 3.88 <i>SD</i> = 0.97	M	16.42	14.92	68.66	3.64	0.99
	F	8.39	15.57	76.04	3.97	0.95
7) The more I know about the target culture, the better I become in the TL <i>M</i> = 3.78 <i>SD</i> = 0.92	M	16.42	25.37	58.21	3.50	0.97
	F	4.79	25.75	69.46	3.89	0.87
8) You cannot become proficient in the TL without learning about its culture. <i>M</i> = 3.66 <i>SD</i> = 1.05	M	22.39	19.4	58.21	3.41	1.13
	F	14.38	18.56	67.06	3.76	1.00
6) The more I work on the target culture, the more I want to learn the language <i>M</i> = 3.63 <i>SD</i> = 1.01	M	25.37	22.39	52.24	3.31	1.04
	F	10.18	28.14	61.68	3.74	0.96
3) Learning the target culture negatively influences my perception of own culture <i>M</i> = 1.80 <i>SD</i> = 0.92	M	80.6	10.45	8.95	1.92	0.90
	F	83.23	10.78	5.99	1.75	0.93

As shown in Table 4, the participants are convinced that cultural awareness is needed for full communicative competence in the foreign language (Q 5, $M = 3.99$), which is probably why they also declare that learning the TL is inseparably connected with discovering its culture (Q 4, $M = 3.88$). They less willingly admit that TL competence increases as one broadens knowledge of the target culture (Q 7, $M = 3.78$) and that only learning about the target culture guarantees proficiency in the language (Q 8, $M = 3.66$). The students are even more reluctant to assert that their motivation to learn the TL increases, the more they work on its culture (Q 6, $M = 3.63$). Yet, the majority reject the claim that learning the target culture is detrimental to the sense of their own culture (Q 3, $M = 1.80$).

Regarding the effect of gender, the mean values reveal that almost all the beliefs were stronger among women than men. Only the belief that learning the TL culture negatively impacts on the perception of own culture (Q 3) was more profound among male ($M = 1.92$) than female respondents ($M = 1.75$). Yet, the difference proved statistically insignificant, similarly as for the belief that cultural awareness is indispensable for a good communicative competence in the TL (Q 5). The level of significance was exceeded for the following ideas: that learning the target culture is an important element of learning the TL (Q 4) [$t(117) = 2.33$, $p = 0.0214$, $d = 0.34$], that the increased attention given to the target culture improves motivation for learning the language (Q 6) [$t(113) = 2.92$, $p = 0.0042$, $d = 0.42$], that expertise in the TL develops as cultural knowledge advances (Q 7) [$t(110) = 2.86$, $p = 0.0050$, $d = 0.42$] and that TL proficiency can be achieved only when learning about its culture (Q 8) [$t(109) = 2.21$, $p = 0.0291$, $d = 0.32$].

Table 5. Expectations about learning TL culture.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Variable</i>	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1) I would like to broaden my knowledge of the culture(s) of English-speaking countries <i>M</i> = 4.12 <i>SD</i> = 0.75	M	2.98	23.89	73.13	3.82	0.67
	F	1.8	13.77	84.43	4.25	0.75
9) A native teacher would better motivate me to learn the target culture <i>M</i> = 3.85 <i>SD</i> = 0.94	M	16.42	28.36	55.22	3.53	1.03
	F	5.39	20.96	73.65	3.98	0.87
10) I'm generally satisfied with the amount and selection of target culture aspects I learn in my English classes <i>M</i> = 3.19 <i>SD</i> = 0.93	M	19.4	32.83	47.77	3.29	0.85
	F	28.74	28.15	43.11	3.14	0.96
2) I just want to learn the TL without bothering myself with its culture. <i>M</i> = 2.19 <i>SD</i> = 1.08	M	64.18	13.43	22.39	2.50	1.10
	F	72.45	16.17	11.38	2.06	1.05

As shown in Table 5, the majority of the participants declare the desire to better familiarize themselves with the culture(s) of the studied language (Q 1, $M = 4.12$). Additionally, the rather low results for Q 2 ($M = 2.19$) reveal the students' reluctance to simply learn the TL with no elements of its culture. Still, the answers to this item were quite divergent, which is evidenced by the standard deviation value of 1.08. A number of participants also admit that their motivation to learn the target culture would improve if they had a native teacher (Q 9, $M = 3.85$), yet they are somewhat disappointed at the TL cultural material offered in the course of studies (Q 10, $M = 3.19$).

As for the effect of gender, the mean values indicate that women are more concerned about TL cultural knowledge than men. Specifically, female respondents expressed a greater desire to learn the target culture (Q 1) than the male ones, which proved to be extremely statistically significant [$t(135) = 4.28, p < 0.0001, d = 0.60$]. Similarly, they much more strongly emphasized the motivating role of a native teacher (Q 9) [$t(105) = 3.15, p = 0.0021, d = 0.47$]. By comparison, men more readily declared that they would like to focus on the TL itself, not on its culture (Q 2) [$t(116) = 2.80, p = 0.0060, d = 0.40$]. They were also more enthusiastic than women about the amount and selection of TL cultural knowledge covered in classes (Q 10), though this difference did not reach the significance level.

Overall, the results in Part B show substantial dissimilarities in male and female beliefs and expectations about learning TL culture. As many as 7 of the differences between the mean values of both groups oscillated between 0.33 and 0.45, and were found statistically significant, with effect sizes varying in strength from almost medium – 2 cases, through medium – 4, to large – 1.

3.3 Part C: preferences for learning about selected TL cultural elements

Part C asked the question: *When studying English, how important is it for you to learn about the TL cultural elements listed below?* to find out which aspects of the TL culture the participants prefer to work on. In Tables 6, 7 and 8 there are shown descriptive statistics as well as the percentages of responses to the Likert-scale items in the ‘important’ (I), ‘moderately important’ (MI) and ‘unimportant’ (U) categories.

Table 6. Preferences for learning about TL cultural elements (total $M > 4.00$).

		M	F			M	F			M	F
Linguistic aspects		$M = 4.32$ $SD = 0.90$		National habits & the like		$M = 4.29$ $SD = 0.81$		Rules of behaviour		$M = 4.29$ $SD = 0.89$	
	U %	10.45	5.39		U %	8.96	1.80		U %	7.46	2.99
	MI%	7.46	7.78		MI%	16.42	7.19		MI%	16.42	8.99
	I %	82.09	86.83		I %	74.62	91.01		I %	76.12	88.02
	M	4.19	4.38		M	4.04	4.40		M	4.13	4.36
	SD	1.01	0.84		SD	1.00	0.70		SD	1.08	0.79
Everyday life		$M = 4.26$ $SD = 0.92$		Values & beliefs		$M = 4.18$ $SD = 0.82$		Social problems		$M = 4.04$ $SD = 0.90$	
	U %	11.94	2.99		U %	8.96	1.20		U %	11.94	1.80
	MI%	13.43	13.78		MI%	11.94	13.78		MI%	29.85	14.97
	I %	74.63	83.23		I %	79.10	85.02		I %	58.21	83.23
	M	4.05	4.34		M	4.00	4.25		M	3.65	4.19
	SD	1.11	0.82		SD	0.98	0.73		SD	1.02	0.90

As shown in Table 6, the participants attach high value to linguistic aspects ($M = 4.32$), national habits and the like ($M = 4.29$), rules of behaviour ($M = 4.29$) and details of everyday life ($M = 4.26$). Values and beliefs ($M = 4.18$) and social problems ($M = 4.04$) are regarded as somewhat less important.

Examining the effect of gender, the mean values reveal that enthusiasm for all the above TL cultural elements was greater among women than men. The differences were statistically significant for social problems [$t(100) = 3.88$, $p = 0.0002$, $d = 0.56$] as well as national habits and the like [$t(93) = 2.69$, $p = 0.0084$, $d = 0.41$]. Less sharp, though at the brink of significance, were the differences in the students’ preferences for learning about values and beliefs [$t(96) = 1.88$, $p = 0.0620$, $d = 0.28$] as well as elements of everyday life [$t(96) = 1.93$, $p = 0.0557$, $d = 0.29$]. The differences proved insignificant for linguistic aspects and rules of behaviour.

Table 7. Preferences for learning about TL cultural elements (total $M = 3.53 - 3.99$).

		M	F			M	F			M	F			
Literature		$M = 3.99$ $SD = 0.92$		Geography		$M = 3.98$ $SD = 0.93$		Music		$M = 3.75$ $SD = 1.02$				
		U %	11.49		5.39		U %		10.45	5.99		U %	22.39	9.58
		MI%	25.38		12.57		MI%		22.39	15.57		MI%	19.40	20.36
		I %	62.68		82.04		I %		67.16	78.44		I %	58.21	70.06
		M	3.62		4.14		M		3.71	4.08		M	3.47	3.86
		SD	0.95		0.88		SD		0.90	0.93		SD	1.10	0.96
Personal relationships		$M = 3.73$ $SD = 1.03$		System of education		$M = 3.73$ $SD = 0.98$		History		$M = 3.65$ $SD = 1.02$				
		U %	16.42		8.39		U %		20.89	6.59		U %	13.43	15.57
		MI%	29.85		19.16		MI%		38.81	22.75		MI%	28.36	19.16
		I %	53.73		72.45		I %		40.30	70.66		I %	58.21	62.27
		M	3.41		3.86		M		3.23	3.94		M	3.52	3.71
		SD	1.01		1.01		SD		0.98	0.90		SD	0.97	1.04
Art		$M = 3.64$ $SD = 1.00$		Media		$M = 3.61$ $SD = 1.04$		Famous buildings		$M = 3.57$ $SD = 1.07$				
		U %	28.36		7.19		U %		29.85	8.38		U %	32.84	8.99
		MI%	25.38		28.14		MI%		20.89	25.15		MI%	37.31	24.55
		I %	46.26		64.67		I %		49.26	66.47		I %	29.85	66.46
		M	3.17		3.82		M		3.25	3.76		M	2.95	3.82
		SD	1.08		0.91		SD		1.21	0.93		SD	1.10	0.96
Food & drink		$M = 3.56$ $SD = 1.10$		Monarchy		$M = 3.53$ $SD = 1.09$		Leisure activities		$M = 3.53$ $SD = 0.99$				
		U %	31.34		10.78		U %		29.85	13.78		U %	23.88	9.58
		MI%	38.81		22.75		MI%		28.36	22.15		MI%	38.81	31.14
		I %	29.85		66.47		I %		41.79	64.07		I %	37.31	59.28
		M	3.01		3.79		M		3.08	3.71		M	3.11	3.70
		SD	1.16		0.99		SD		0.99	1.08		SD	1.00	0.94

As shown in Table 7, the participants are less enthusiastic about literature ($M = 3.99$), geography ($M = 3.98$), music ($M = 3.75$) and personal relationships with the mean score of 3.73, the same as for system of education. History is ranked even lower ($M = 3.65$), similarly as art ($M = 3.64$), media ($M = 3.61$), famous buildings ($M = 3.57$), food and drink ($M = 3.56$) or monarchy and leisure activities, both with the mean score of 3.53.

Considering the effect of gender, the mean values indicate that all the above TL cultural elements were rated higher by women than men. History was the only item for which the difference missed statistical significance. In seven cases the differences proved to be extremely significant, namely, for literature [$t(113) = 3.86, p = 0.0002, d = 0.56$], system of education [$t(113) = 5.12, p < 0.0001, d = 0.75$], art [$t(105) = 4.34, p < 0.0001, d = 0.65$], famous buildings [$t(108) = 5.66, p < 0.0001, d = 0.47$], food and drink [$t(106) = 4.84, p < 0.0001, d = 0.72$], monarchy [$t(132) = 4.28, p < 0.0001, d = 0.60$] and leisure activities [$t(115) = 4.14, p < 0.0001, d = 0.60$]. In three cases the differences were very significant, specifically, for geography [$t(125) = 2.81, p = 0.0057, d = 0.40$], personal relationships [$t(121) = 3.08, p = 0.0026, d = 0.44$] and media [$t(98) = 3.10, p = 0.0025, d = 0.47$]. Additionally, the significance level was exceeded for music [$t(108) = 2.53, p = 0.0125, d = 0.37$].

Table 8. Preferences for learning about TL cultural elements (total $M < 3.53$).

		M	F			M	F			M	F
Economy & business life		$M = 3.52$ $SD = 1.04$		Politics		$M = 3.46$ $SD = 1.10$		Theatre		$M = 3.29$ $SD = 1.08$	
	U %	28.36	8.99		U %	22.39	15.57		U %	38.81	17.36
	MI%	34.33	31.13		MI%	20.89	31.14		MI%	34.33	26.95
	I %	37.31	59.88		I %	56.72	53.29		I %	26.96	55.69
	M	3.13	3.67		M	3.40	3.49		M	2.83	3.47
	SD	1.15	0.95		SD	1.12	1.09		SD	1.10	1.02
Science & technology issues		$M = 3.28$ $SD = 1.01$		Religion		$M = 3.27$ $SD = 1.20$		Famous people		$M = 3.08$ $SD = 0.98$	
	U %	23.88	19.16		U %	38.81	19.16		U %	47.76	20.96
	MI%	40.30	37.13		MI%	32.83	26.35		MI%	26.86	40.72
	I %	35.82	43.71		I %	28.36	54.49		I %	25.38	38.32
	M	3.17	3.32		M	2.86	3.44		M	2.68	3.23
	SD	1.01	1.01		SD	1.21	1.16		SD	1.00	0.93
Sports		$M = 2.79$ $SD = 1.09$		Clothes		$M = 2.55$ $SD = 1.14$		Celebrities		$M = 2.18$ $SD = 1.05$	
	U %	55.22	32.94		U %	67.16	44.31		U %	85.07	60.48
	MI%	25.38	42.51		MI%	20.89	31.74		MI%	8.96	26.95
	I %	19.40	24.55		I %	11.95	23.95		I %	5.97	12.57
	M	2.50	2.91		M	2.11	2.73		M	1.76	2.35
	SD	1.21	1.02		SD	1.13	1.10		SD	0.90	1.06

As shown in Table 8, the participants do not particularly favour economy and business life ($M = 3.52$) and politics ($M = 3.46$). Theatre ($M = 3.29$), science and technology issues ($M = 3.28$), religion ($M = 3.27$) and famous people ($M = 3.08$) are even less valued. The least less important prove to be sports ($M = 2.79$), clothes ($M = 2.55$) and celebrities ($M = 2.18$).

Regarding the effect of gender, the mean values reveal that women were generally keener on all the above TL cultural elements than men. In fact, the statistical significance of the differences was reached for the following items: economy and business life [$t(103) = 3.40, p = 0.0009, d = 0.51$], theatre [$t(113) = 4.10, p < 0.0001, d = 0.60$], religion [$t(117) = 3.35, p = 0.0011, d = 0.48$], famous people [$t(114) = 3.87, p = 0.0002, d = 0.56$], sports [$t(105) = 2.44, p = 0.0161, d = 0.36$], clothes [$t(118) = 3.82, p = 0.0002, d = 0.55$] and celebrities [$t(142) = 4.30, p < 0.0001, d = 0.60$]. It was not achieved for politics as well as science and technology issues.

Overall, the results in Part C indicate marked differences in male and female preferences for learning about the TL cultural elements considered ($N = 27$), with women being more interested in all of them than men. As many as 20 of the differences between the mean scores of both groups oscillated between 0.36 and 0.87, and their significance was statistically confirmed, with effect sizes varying in strength from almost medium – 2 cases, through medium – 3 and almost large – 7, to large – 8. Moreover, in two cases the level of significance was almost reached, with both values of effect size above small.

3.4 Part D: preferences for ways of learning TL culture

Part D asked the question: *When studying English, how do you prefer to learn about the TL culture?* to determine the preferred ways of learning TL culture. In Tables 9 and 10 there are shown descriptive statistics as well as the percentages of responses to the Likert-scale items in the ‘agree’ (A), ‘undecided’ (U) and ‘disagree’ (D) categories.

Table 9. Preferences for ways of learning TL culture (total mean > 4.00).

<i>Item</i>	<i>Variable</i>	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1) Going abroad to the TL country <i>M</i> = 4.60 <i>SD</i> = 0.64	M	4.48	13.43	82.09	4.28	0.86
	F	0	1.2	98.8	4.73	0.46
2) From native speakers <i>M</i> = 4.50 <i>SD</i> = 0.63	M	0	8.95	91.05	4.23	0.60
	F	1.2	1.8	97	4.61	0.61
3) From the target culture TV, cinema, films, videos <i>M</i> = 4.37 <i>SD</i> = 0.73	M	4.48	14.92	80.6	4.19	0.90
	F	0.6	5.99	93.41	4.44	0.63
4) Listening to the target culture songs, music <i>M</i> = 4.32 <i>SD</i> = 0.82	M	5.97	16.42	77.61	4.02	0.85
	F	3.59	7.78	88.63	4.43	0.78
5) From the Internet (e.g. virtual visits to museums, looking at photos, browsing websites) <i>M</i> = 4.07 <i>SD</i> = 0.81	M	5.97	17.91	76.12	3.95	0.87
	F	3.59	14.38	82.03	4.11	0.78

As shown in Table 9, the participants are especially keen on learning TL culture by visiting the country (Q 1, *M* = 4.60) and maintaining contact with native speakers (Q 2, *M* = 4.50). A positive attitude is also adopted towards target culture TV and cinema (Q 3, *M* = 4.37), music (Q 4, *M* = 4.32) and the Internet (Q 5, *M* = 4.07).

Considering the effect of gender, the mean values reveal that all the above ways of learning TL culture were more popular among women than men. Moreover, the differences were extremely statistically significant for Q 1 [$t(81) = 4.05, p = 0.0001, d = 0.65$], Q 2 [$t(123) = 4.35, p < 0.0001, d = 0.62$] and Q 4 [$t(112) = 3.41, p = 0.0009, d = 0.50$]. The level of significance was also exceeded for Q 3 [$t(93) = 2.07, p = 0.0404, d = 0.32$] but missed for Q 5: learning from the Internet.

Table 10. Preferences for ways of learning TL culture (total mean < 4.00).

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Variable</i>	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
6) Reading the target culture literature <i>M</i> = 3.78 <i>SD</i> = 0.98	M	17.91	41.79	40.3	3.31	0.97
	F	5.99	22.16	71.85	3.97	0.92
7) From my English classes <i>M</i> = 3.76 <i>SD</i> = 0.77	M	8.95	34.33	56.72	3.53	0.74
	F	5.99	15.57	78.44	3.86	0.76
8) Comparing own culture with the TL one <i>M</i> = 3.68 <i>SD</i> = 0.96	M	10.45	32.83	56.72	3.53	0.94
	F	8.38	29.94	61.68	3.74	0.96
9) Discussing about the TL cultural elements <i>M</i> = 3.67 <i>SD</i> = 0.93	M	11.94	47.76	40.3	3.34	0.76
	F	9.58	23.35	67.07	3.81	0.96
10) Reading the target culture press <i>M</i> = 3.63 <i>SD</i> = 1.00	M	23.88	31.34	44.78	3.19	0.98
	F	8.38	28.14	63.48	3.81	0.96
11) Participating in social networking <i>M</i> = 3.60 <i>SD</i> = 1.01	M	23.88	43.28	32.84	3.16	1.06
	F	9.58	22.75	67.67	3.78	0.93
12) Admiring the works and products of TL culture <i>M</i> = 3.59 <i>SD</i> = 0.87	M	14.92	49.26	35.82	3.23	0.79
	F	7.19	32.93	59.88	3.73	0.87

As shown in Table 10, the participants are less keen on such ways of learning TL culture as reading its literature (Q 6, $M = 3.78$), attending English classes (Q 7, $M = 3.76$), comparing own culture with the TL one (Q 8, $M = 3.68$) and discussing about the TL cultural elements (Q 9, $M = 3.67$). Moderately popular is also learning TL culture by reading its press (Q 10, $M = 3.63$) or engaging in social networking (Q 11, $M = 3.60$). The least preferred is admiring the works and products of TL culture (Q 12, $M = 3.59$), which generated the highest proportion of undecided responses (41.09% from the whole sample).

Looking now at the effect of gender, the mean values indicate that all the above ways of learning TL culture were valued more by women than men. These differences proved to be very statistically significant for Q 7 [$t(124) = 3.05$, $p = 0.0027$, $d = 0.43$], and extremely, for Q 6 [$t(116) = 4.77$, $p < 0.0001$, $d = 0.69$], Q 9 [$t(152) = 3.95$, $p = 0.0001$, $d = 0.54$], Q 10 [$t(119) = 4.40$, $p < 0.0001$, $d = 0.63$], Q 11 [$t(108) = 4.18$, $p < 0.0001$, $d = 0.62$], and Q 12 [$t(133) = 4.24$, $p < 0.0001$, $d = 0.60$]. The difference failed to reach the significance threshold only for making comparisons between the TL and own culture (Q 8).

Overall, the results in Part D reveal profound differences in male and female preferences for the specific ways of learning about the TL culture, with women being more enthusiastic about all of them than men. As many as 10 of the differences between the mean values of both groups oscillated between 0.25 and 0.66, and their significance was statistically proved, with effect sizes varying in strength from almost medium – 1 cases, through medium – 4 and almost large – 2, to large – 3.

4. Discussion

As regards the first research question, the results show that most of the participants associate culture with both its high and low aspects, which is especially evident among female respondents. Associations with low culture are much less popular, though here the difference between men and women is very subtle. Yet, the least frequently chosen high culture is more preferred by male than female respondents. With respect to the choice of the primary English-speaking culture, the general trend to stress British culture is particularly manifest among women. American culture is much less popular, which however is less evident among male respondents. Unfortunately, the students are indifferent to the other English-speaking cultures. This indicates an educational gap that should be filled, especially in the era of “making languages a means of communication in the sense of a mode of openness and access to otherness” (Bernaus, et al., 2007: 10).

Addressing the second research question, it is clear that TL cultural knowledge is of growing importance to the participants, especially the female ones. Indeed, women, more than men, believe that cultural awareness is necessary for L2 communicative competence. According to them, learning the TL is inextricably linked with discovering its culture. This attitude agrees with “the best language education happening today”, as Cutshall (2012: 32) puts it, in which “the study of another language is synonymous with the study of another culture”. Yet, women seem less convinced, but still more than men, that there is a direct correlation between expertise, proficiency or even motivation to learn the TL and the amount of background on its culture. It is also important to note that most of the students, particularly females, firmly reject the idea that learning the target culture has a negative effect on the sense of their own culture. As for the participants’ expectations about learning TL culture, they are generally higher among women than men. The majority wish to know more about the culture(s) of the studied language and quite a few consider a native teacher as the motivating factor. They also have some reservations about the TL cultural material included in the curriculum and only few wish to focus solely on the TL.

Regarding the third research question, it should be mentioned that all the TL cultural elements considered are more important to women than men. The most favoured are linguistic aspects, everyday life, rules of behaviour as well as equally valued national habits and the like, followed by values and beliefs, and further by social problems. The least preferred are celebrities, clothes and sports. There thus seems to be a strong inclination towards those aspects of the TL culture that are related either to everyday existence or to the matters included in the study programs. Yet, interest is limited regarding such details as personal relationships, the media, food and drink, styles of entertainment or famous people. Also, clear elements of high culture like art, theatre or literature are not particularly liked, though music is ranked a bit higher. Little significance is attached to the monarchy

and politics, although history meets with greater enthusiasm, which however cannot be said of famous cultural buildings and monuments. Geography is considered as quite important, the same as system of education, though such aspects of social life as economy and business life as well as science and technology issues are not really valued, which is also the case with religion.

As for the fourth research question, the observed preferences for different ways of learning TL culture are basically more marked among women. The most popular are visits abroad or conversations with native speakers, which confirms Catalan's (2003) finding that women, more than men, value practising with native speakers. Highly valued are also those methods which are somewhat linked with leisure activities, such as target culture TV, cinema, music and the Internet. Less popular is reading TL literature and attending English classes. Interest is even lower in comparing the TL with own culture or talking about the former. Yet, the least favoured ways of learning TL culture include reading its press, participating in social networking, and finally admiring the works and products of TL culture.

Inevitably, the present study has its limitations. Similarly as in many other second language studies, the participants were selected based on their availability. Indeed, the surveyed group included all English language students at the particular Polish university, which hinders the generalization of the findings. Thus, to strengthen the validity of the results and facilitate their transferability to other research settings (see Lazaraton, 1995: 465), effect size values were calculated. This makes the results usable for comparisons and correlation with other studies. Also, highlighting the relative size of male-female differences is vital considering the limited number of male respondents, which fortunately corresponds to the sample size of >30, as recommended for *t*-tests by Pallant (2010). Still, it would be pertinent for future research in this area to use a larger pool of participants, especially the male ones.

5. Conclusion

The present study explored how gender affects the attitudes and preferences of Polish students of English for learning TL culture. The results reveal major differences between the surveyed men and women, with the latter being more concerned about their TL cultural knowledge than the former. This correlates with the general tendency of females to "place a greater relative importance on and invest more time in language learning than males" (Nyikos, 2008: 78). Generally, the study shows that women, more than men, consider the target culture, perceived by them as a combination of high and low elements of its British heritage, as central to perfecting their knowledge of the language. Hence, in comparison with men, they express a stronger desire to learn more about the TL culture, especially about its linguistic aspects, but not necessarily in class or following what is included in the curriculum. Instead, women prefer to gain their TL cultural experience through direct contact with that culture, or at least from a native

teacher. Overall, these findings suggest that there should be developed a gendered sensitivity to the attitudes and preferences of English majors in Poland for learning TL culture. Yet, it cannot be forgotten, as Catalan (2003: 64) remarks, that “as human beings, males and females are more alike than different”, therefore, “although there may be sex differences in language learning [...] research carried out so far is not conclusive enough to determine absolutely different ways of learning for the two sexes”. Thus, before attempting to create a supportive learning environment for male and female students, future research is needed to explore the complex interplay between gender, TL culture learning and other relevant learning factors, including the individuality of actual learners.

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