

Online Test Designing to Teach Cultural Words

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Online teaching and learning have been recently seen much in Vietnam and many other countries. Foreign languages are considered a pivotal subject to learn for the past few years in Hanoi and a number of provinces. This subject has been taught both online and offline, or it can be called blended learning. In terms of online language teaching, designing materials including tests is of large concern for teachers and educators. Within this study, the authors investigate the issue of designing online tests of English cultural words based on an EFL course book being used at a university. Key research method is collecting and classifying English cultural words from an EFL course book and designing appropriate online tests for the students basing on reliable theoretical principles.

Keywords: online teaching and learning, online language teaching, designing online tests, English cultural words

Introduction

Designing tests is an aspect which is popularly concerned by both teachers and educators. Online tests have been so far designed by teachers and done by learners of all subjects including English. In terms of English tests, online vocabulary tests are much paid attention to. Nation (1990) emphasized that when testing learners' vocabulary, the criteria to note are if the knowledge is required to answer the questions correctly similar to the knowledge required by the EFL course; thus, the type of questions should reflect the type of teaching and learning in the course. Cultural words are among the wide source of vocabulary to recognize and learn for their special meanings. Within the study, the authors focus on designing online tests on English cultural words from an EFL course book called *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing)*. The tests are designed based on common theoretical principles that are mentioned in literature review.

Significance of the Study

The topic of this research is much concerned by language teachers and educators. Those who teach English in Vietnam and other countries are going to find the research paper critical and beneficial, to some extent. This is because testing is normally cared about in any subject including English. Testing English vocabulary, specifically cultural words are something interesting and worth spending time on. The study is hopefully useful for those who care about from the perspective of designing English vocabulary tests.

Literature Review

Cultural Words

Definition of cultural words. The writers consult definitions of cultural words from certain research papers including John Locke (1976), Wierzbicka (1997), and Li, Ran, and Xia (2010).

First and foremost, John Locke (1976, p. 226) discusses the term “cultural words” in a language; there exist a “great store of words ... which have not any that answer them in another language”. These words are the symbol of certain complex ideas which are created with the customs and manner of people’s life.

Another author called Wierzbicka (1997, p. 5) figured out the term cultural words in another way. In a sense, it may seem clear that words of special, culture-specific meanings reflect and pass on not only ways of living characteristic of a given society but also ways of thinking. She associated cultural key words with extremely vital and revealing words in certain cultures (pp. 15-16). Another research done by Li, Ran, and Xia (2010) says cultural vocabulary is words with image culture; the words are the results of long-lasting history and culture of tribes, closely associated with traditional legend or ancestors’ worship.

Finally, Goddard (2015, p. 386) emphasizes that “cultural key words” mean particularly culture-rich and translation-resistant vocabulary occupying focal points in cultural ways when people think, act, feel, and speak. In terms of culture-related words, he points out that there is a culture-connectedness of words considered as seemingly ordinary depending on the method of semantic analysis (p. 395).

In short, it can be seen that cultural words are the type of vocabulary that is culture-specific in meaning and they reflect living characteristics, customs, and manners of a human society.

Classification of cultural words. The authors found a few ways of classifying cultural words in the following studies.

Newmark (1988) divided cultural vocabulary into five specific types, as mentioned below: ecology (flora, fauna, wind, valley, mountains); material culture or artefact (food, cloth, housing, city, transportation); social culture (work, leisure); organization (customs, activities, procedures, political, administrative concepts, religion, arts); gestures, habits.

Balaban and Çaðayan (2014) categorized cultural words into 17 subtypes including: (1) plant names; (2) animal names; (3) food culture; (4) goods, material or object words; (5) maritime-related words; and so on. Alonso and Ponte (2015) are based on the below classification for cultural words (Byram & Morgan, 1994; CEFR, 2001) in their research.

Table 1

Cultural Words Classification

Everyday living	Food, working, school, holidays, leisure activities, clothes, housing.
Cultural heritage	Famous monuments and people, literature, TV shows, movies, music.
National identity	Languages, religions, nationality, history, humour, art, and politics from different cultures.
Popular culture	Rites, traditions, celebrations, festivals, social conventions, dances, discos, religious observances and values, types of music, among others.
Society	Living standards, classes, urban tribes, minorities, family structures, regional cultures and subcultures.
Geography	Countries, continents, cities, towns, streets.
Stereotypes	Typical features attributed to certain cultures.
Language	Borrowings, informal register, idioms, collocations.
Worldwide issues	Political, economic, social, and environmental issues.
Institutions and organization	Official institutions and organizations from different countries.
Varieties	Words from other varieties of English.
Social interaction	Greetings, apologies, politeness.

In this study, the authors follow the final way of classification as it is easy to recognize and classify cultural vocabulary with this method.

Criteria to recognize cultural words. Wierzbicka (1997) clarified the criteria to determine this typical type of words: The words belong to common vocabulary, used frequently on a typical semantic aspect, and put in the central position of a particular complete phrase. Wierzbicka (1997) emphasized that cultural words were not only single words but also common collocations, set phrases, grammatical constructions, proverbs, and some others. Therefore, cultural vocabulary has diverse forms.

Principles to Design Online Tests

Vocabulary tests. According to Nation (1990), there are two types of vocabulary tests, that is, recognition and recall ones. In recall tests, learners are tested whether they can produce words. In recognition tests, meaning of words are tested after learners hear or see them.

It is said that the vocabulary test is used to check learners' vocabulary size. There exist two basic methods of testing the size of vocabulary, that is, dictionary sampling and corpus. It could be found out that there are two types of vocabulary tests: Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test (developed by Paul Meara and his partners, a Yes/No Vocabulary Test on the computer, and then test takers choose the words with the meaning they know) and Vocabulary Levels Tests (designed by Paul Nation as the test for analysis by the teachers, testing knowledge of frequently used vocabulary).

In Nation (1990), four versions of vocabulary tests were developed, Versions A, B, C, and D. After that, these versions were modified by Norbet, Diane, and Caroline (Schmitt, 1999). The test was designed with five sections of four vocabulary frequency levels and one level of academic words taken from Academic Word List. Four levels of vocabulary frequency consist of 2000, 3000, 5000, and 10,000 words.

As far as this study is concerned, the authors aim at designing online tests on cultural words taken from an EFL course book with such online tools as Quizlet, Quizizz, Blooket, Google Forms.

Online tools for digital assessment. The webpage namely <https://ednewsstand.weebly.com/digital-assessments.html> explained several online tools as Quizizz, Quizlet, Blooket, and Google Forms can be used for digital assessment.

Firstly, Quizlet looks like just a flashcard-based study aid and not really a traditional digital assessment. Quizlet is a model to help students at all levels understand and remember their content while playing games for learning. It also has a digital assessment component allowing teachers to see how students study and to monitor their progress through created study-aids. Quizlet is designed with: millions of prebuilt study sets, seven vocabulary study modes online, five study modes in the app, adaptive and independent study activities, practice tests, and timed games.

Secondly, Quizizz allows learners to see questions on their own device, and provides feedback the same way. It can be assigned for students in class or as homework. It integrates well with Google. The telescoping features for creating assessments is a game changer. And reports are saved to be accessible later to identify problems or share during conferences. Teachers can do many things with Quizizz: self-paced assessment, real-time feedback at individual and class levels, search from millions of premade assessments and questions, use in class or as homework.

Thirdly, Blooket is the later generation of game-based classroom activities. It is similar to Kahoot and Quizizz in that you select a question set (create, import, or discover) fitting the lesson plan. It is unique for the

game modes and avatars. Avatars are unlocked in the market with rewards earned by playing games. When the teacher starts playing BlooKet, the classroom is bound to get pretty loud and excited fairly quickly. Teachers can do such things as: assess students with multiple choice questions based on text or an image; reward and motivate students through different game modes like tower defense, tower of doom, crazy kingdom, battle royal, and racing; evaluate understanding through pre-assessments and reviews; get actionable insights in real-time, through reports and detailed question analysis.

Finally, Google Forms has been a very powerful tool within the G Suite family of apps. As Google Forms has the ability to be a self-graded quiz, it can easily integrate into a gradebook. It also can create classroom evaluations, classroom polls, or exit tickets. It can be embedded in an email or website and differentiated. Teachers are able to: create conference registrations, quick opinion poll, differentiated classroom assessments, and more; analyze and summarize results at a glance with charts and graphs; grade assessments quickly with the quiz feature; import grades directly into Google Classroom. Therefore, those online tools mentioned above can be utilized to design online test for students' formative assessment.

Online tests. Bicanich, Slivinski, Kapes, and Hardwicke (1997) explained that the tests on the Internet led to similar results in comparison with standard paper-and-pencil ones in the traditional class; as a result, online tests are as valid and reliable as other types of exams.

Melody (2000) did research in Pennsylvania with 400 adults. Findings revealed that most of the students, after taking an online examination, were in favor of taking the test on the Internet rather than conventional method although over two-thirds of the participants did not have any experience with the Internet. It can be seen clearly that students like testing on the computer because of various reasons such as being comfortable while working online and getting results quickly, even immediately.

When designing online tests, some guidelines should be considered (Rice, 2003). First and foremost, tests and quizzes should be used mainly for enhancing learning, not only grading. Secondly, the way and time to give students feedback should be cared about. Thirdly, it is advisable to decide whether and how tests are graded. Fourthly, such things as the tests are closed book, closed web, open book, or open web and the time allowance ought to be thoroughly discussed. Some other factors that should also be counted carefully are: technical problems, retaking the test, valid questions, testing capabilities on the Internet, collaboration on several online tests, and finally minimizing opportunities for cheating.

Research Questions

Here are research questions for the study:

1. What is the list of cultural words from the EFL course book called *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing)*?
2. What are the online tests of English cultural words from the course book designed for students?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting

The study was carried out in the context of a course for 2nd-year English-majored students focusing on reading and writing. Cultural words used for designing online tests were taken from an EFL course book. The tests were designed to assist students more on their way to much better results in reading and writing skills.

Design of the Study

Key research methods are collecting, classifying, and analyzing cultural words from an EFL course book for English-major students with the assistance of the theoretical framework. Based on the number of cultural words collected, diverse online vocabulary tests are designed in detail to check students' knowledge of English cultural words from the course book.

Data Collection & Analysis

The definition, classification of cultural words, and principles to design online vocabulary tests are firstly mentioned as theoretical framework. It is then followed by the list of English cultural words grouped based on the criteria discussed. Finally, online tests on English cultural words are designed in different forms with such online tools as Quizlet, Quizizz, Blooket, and Google Form.

Findings and Discussion

Cultural Words Found in an EFL Course Book

The cultural words used for this study are taken from an EFL course book called *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing)* by Daise, Norloff, and Carne (2011), New York: Oxford University Press.

The cultural words collected belong to a variety of groups based on the theoretical theory of cultural words classification proposed by Alonso and Ponte (2015).

Group 1 contains Proper Nouns (famous people, famous places, movies, organization, countries, nationalities, cities, and so on).

For example: Massachusetts, Tokyo, Japan, Bono, Nobel Prize, Spider Man 2, Peter Pan.

This group of cultural words is easily recognized and understood as they are in capital letters and have obvious meaning both in English and Vietnamese.

Group 2 are Languages (collocations, idioms, proverbs).

For example:

They shed new light on our present condition.

Superheroes can keep that flame alive in our hearts when we read about that mission.

For the second group, cultural vocabulary consists of a few words that are put together for new meanings which require certain background knowledge and deep understanding of the English language.

Group 3 contains the topic of Everyday Living (food, working, school, holidays, leisure activities, clothes, housing).

For example: Ethiopian lore (traditional stories and beliefs), grassroots (coming from the people, not from the government or other authority), book-a-thons (a fund-raising event), donkey-pulled trailer cart, cleaning parks near and around the school, weekend environmental activities, drop-off center, "spices of education", etc.

These words seem to be rather typical in each culture. Some of them are hard to translate into another language; others are partly equivalent in other languages including Vietnamese. As a result, readers are advised to be explained in detail so that they are capable of figuring out the meaning in their mother tongue first.

Designing Online Tests to Teach Cultural Words From an EFL Course Book

Within the study, the authors design online tests on cultural words from an EFL course book with such apps as Quizlet, Quizizz, Blooket, and Google Form. The tests are designed based on the theoretical principles mentioned in Literature Review.

Questions in the online tests can be multiple choice, gap filling, translating phrases into Vietnamese/English, or open questions with short answers. Hereinafter are several images of online cultural words tests designed by the authors for this study.

The first online test was designed with Quizizz app. Students were required to translate certain Vietnamese cultural phrases into English or vice versa. 15 questions were put in the online test with typical cultural words including collocations or idioms. Students were able to know the answer after each question. Each correct answer was counted for the final score of the students after the test was finished. The students could revise the learnt cultural vocabulary from the course book quickly and effectively.

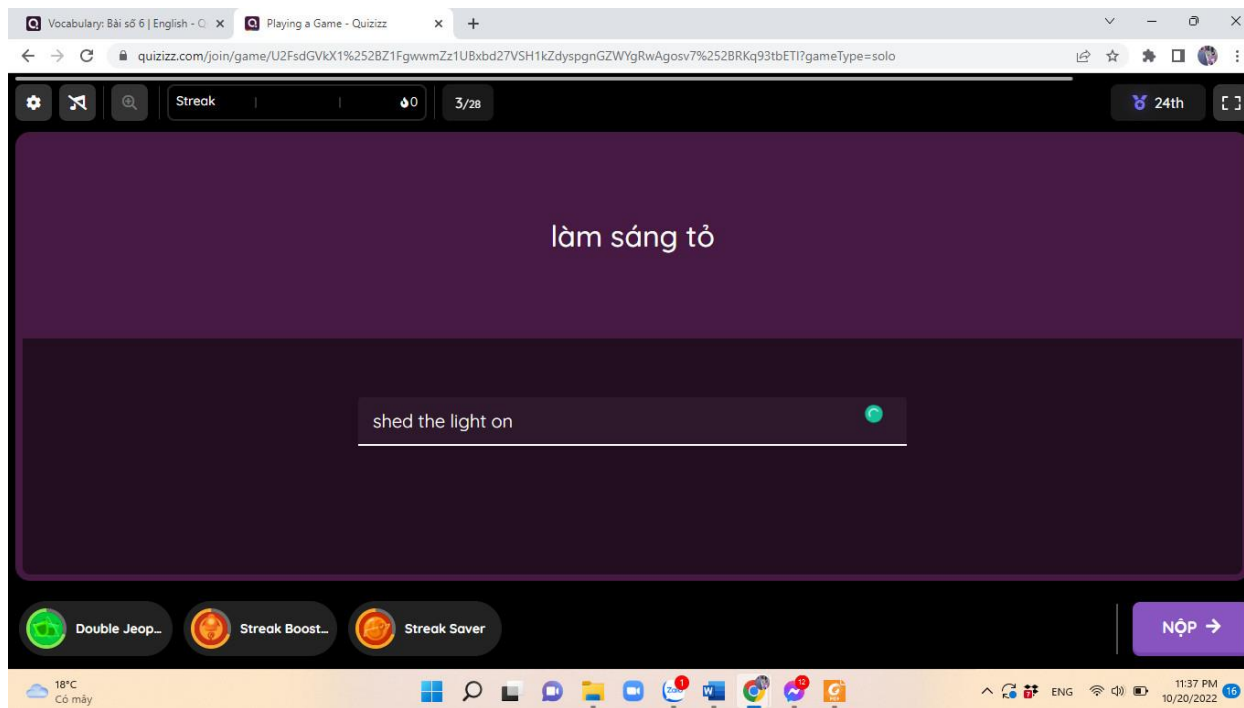


Figure 1. Quizizz app.

The second online test was the multiple choice quiz with Blooket app. 15 questions with cultural words included were mingled and were shown in turns in a game. Students were capable of choosing the game they find interesting to play. In this way, the test is seen as a kind of games, which fascinates students and motivates them to learn vocabulary and make progress. After the game is over, the winner is proclaimed with first place, second place, and third place.

The third online test was written with Quizlet app. This app is used mainly for testing vocabulary. The test was of different sections including Flash Cards, Learn, Test, and Card Matching. The students not only revise the words learnt in class when looking at flash cards but also test the vocabulary and play the game of matching to relax after the test. The test section was designed for the cultural vocabulary they revised with multiple choice, gap-filling, or translating questions.

The fourth online test is on Google Form app. This is considered as one of the very first forms of designing online tests which are easy to use and follow for any teachers and learners. Within the study, a test on English cultural words was designed in the question type of translating into Vietnamese selected words from the course book that students have studied in the semester. 20 sentences with cultural words included were put in the test so

that students were able to check whether they understood those words correctly from the perspective of culture and meaning in certain contexts.

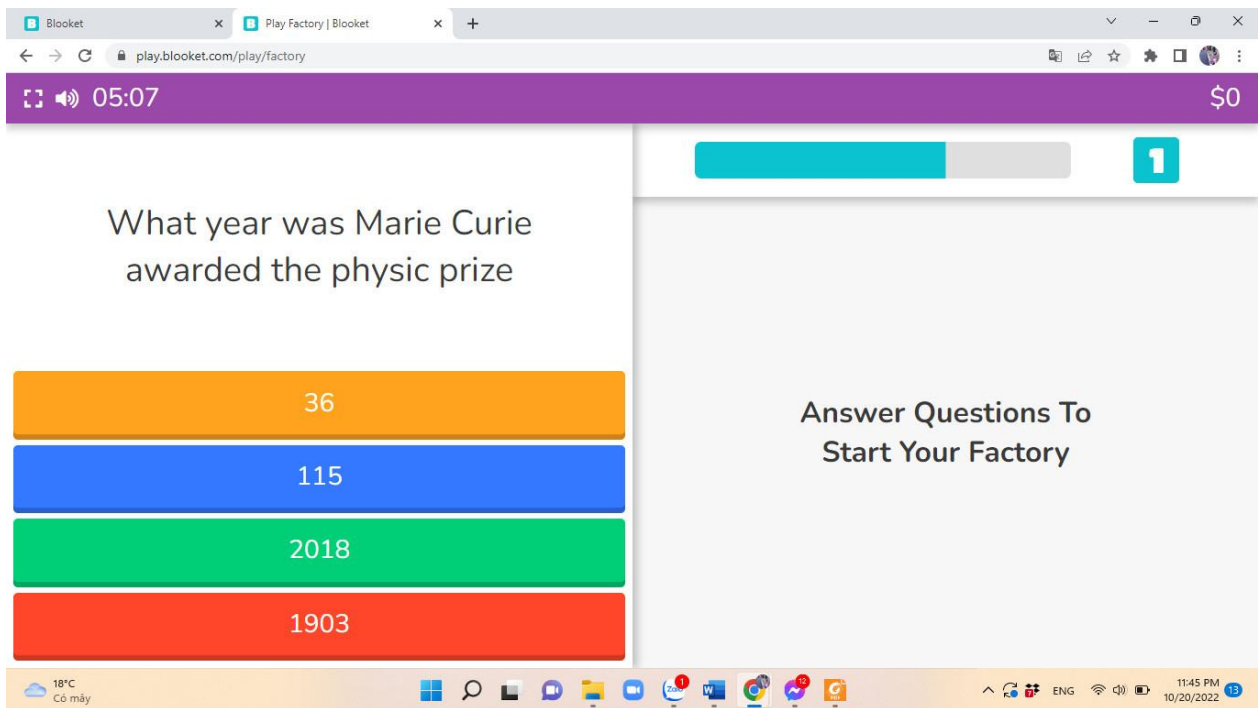


Figure 2. Blooket app.

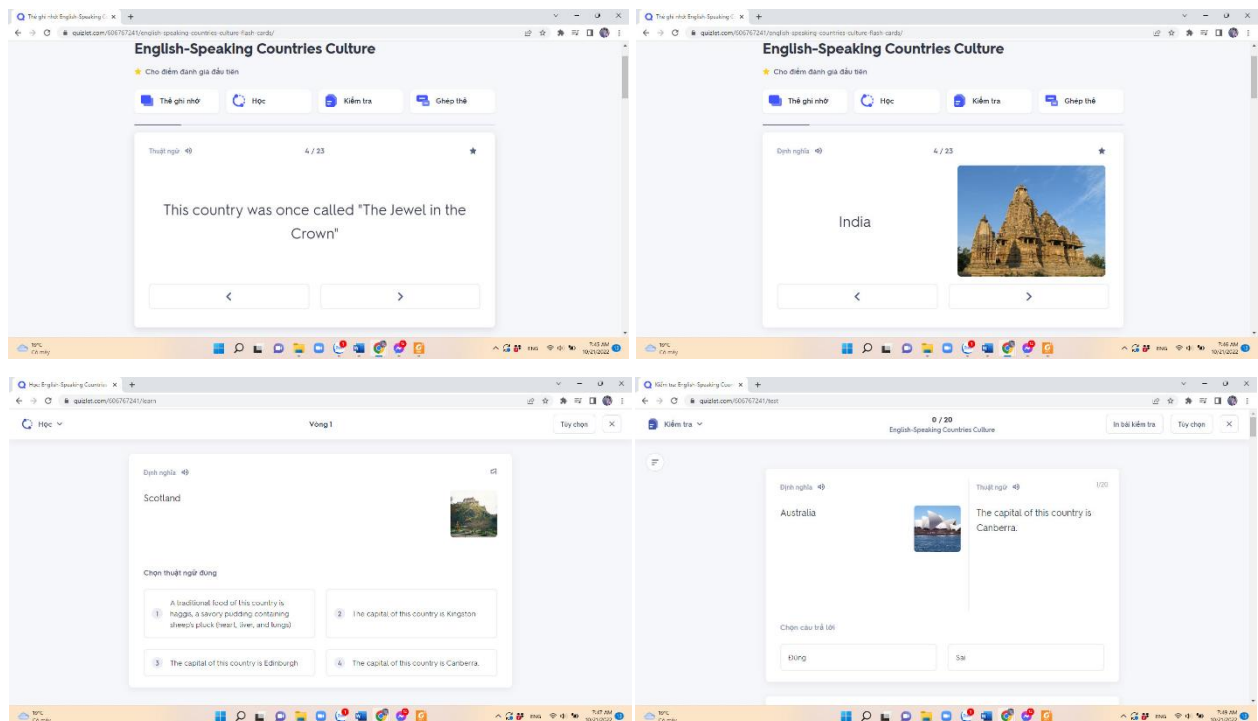


Figure 3. Quizlet app.

Figure 4. Google Forms.

Conclusion

Obviously, the study discussed theoretical knowledge related to cultural words (definition, criteria to recognize, classification) and principles to design online tests including vocabulary tests. A list of typical cultural words was thoroughly taken from the course book for designing online tests on cultural words. Preliminary images of the tests on certain online apps and several details of the tests were revealed in Findings and Discussion.

Due to limited time and scope of study, the findings were still not widespread enough. Hopefully, it is going to be further researched with some other course books in the future.

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