

The Analysis of Character, Intercultural Points, and Its Implication in Teaching Reading

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Abstract. This study explores the characterization of the principal characters in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* and examines its pedagogical implications for teaching reading. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyzes the characters' verbal expressions, nonverbal communication, and actions to identify their dominant traits. The findings reveal that Eric is characterized by courage, physical strength, and a strong sense of honor, whereas Freya exhibits selfishness, manipulation, and cruelty. The intercultural points found are Leadership Style, Love vs. Cultural Rules, Trust and Betrayal, Power Distance, and Communication Style. The study concludes that the movie offers valuable opportunities for reading instruction by providing an engaging narrative that promotes students' comprehension and motivation. Reading-based activities, including summarizing and discussing the film's plot, can be incorporated into classroom practice to enrich students' reading experiences. The analysis of *The Huntsman: Winter's War* demonstrates that the film contains numerous intercultural elements that can be used to promote intercultural awareness in English language learning. Although the story is set in a fantasy world, the interactions among the characters reflect universal cultural values and communication practices that are relevant to intercultural communication. These include leadership styles, loyalty, trust, love, power relations, gender roles, conflict resolution, and moral decision-making.

Keywords: Character depiction, Movie, Teaching reading, Intercultural points

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are essential for student success in various fields of study. According to Shao [1], Literature, as a creative form of expression, reflects human existence and provides insight into human emotions, thoughts, and perspectives. Effective communication between writers and readers depends on the readers' ability to understand the intended message. Furthermore, literary works are often created based on the author's knowledge, experiences, and research [2]-[4]. Literature also encourages readers to think critically about characters, events, and values presented in a text. As a result, reading literary works not only enhances language proficiency but also develops students' analytical skills, empathy, and ability to interpret meaning from different perspectives [3]-[6]. Therefore, literature can serve as an effective medium for improving reading comprehension while fostering intellectual and personal growth among learners.

In reading instruction, activities are generally divided into three stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Pre-reading activities are designed to activate learners' background knowledge and relevant schemata to facilitate reading comprehension and text interpretation [7]. Grabe, states that reading involves several skills, including (a) identifying the main idea, (b) finding details in a text, (c) following a sequence, (d) making inferences from the text, and (e) recognizing patterns of discourse [8]. Furthermore, post-reading activities help students integrate their prior knowledge with the new information obtained from the text [9]-[11]. This integration process also encourages learners to reconstruct meaning from the text in a more personal and meaningful way, allowing them to evaluate, reflect, and relate what they have read to their own experiences or prior understanding. As a result, post-reading stages not only strengthen comprehension but also support deeper cognitive engagement that helps students retain and apply the information more effectively.

Movies serve as a form of escapism or imagination and contribute to the relationship between movies and literature. They record visual details and combine a steady stream of images for entertainment, education, or other uses [1]. Literature can be adapted into movies, providing a platform for individuals to acquire valuable knowledge that can positively impact their future. Movies cater to various objectives, such as learning foreign languages, gaining cultural insights, broadening perspectives, and finding relaxation during free time [12]. With advancements in technology, the internet, and smartphones, movies can be

watched anytime and anywhere. Overall, the use of movies as both an educational and entertainment medium reflects the growing importance of multimedia resources in modern learning, as they not only enrich students' understanding of language and culture but also create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

Character analysis plays a vital role in literary studies and can significantly enhance English language education. Film, as a visual storytelling medium, presents a variety of characters that can be analyzed to engage students and deepen their understanding of literary concepts. The Huntsman: Winter's War is an example of a film that demonstrates the potential of character analysis in English language education. Its diverse characters, with complex motivations and relationships, can help students develop their comprehension and critical thinking skills. A character analysis can begin by examining how a character is introduced and the role they play throughout the story [13]-[15]. Characterization can be understood through analyzing dialogue, actions, and the perspectives of other characters. By analyzing these aspects, students can develop the ability to identify and interpret character motivations, conflicts, and traits.

Nurgiyantoro states that a protagonist is a character who exhibits qualities that align with the audience's or readers' expectations [16]. A protagonist is generally portrayed through positive traits such as chivalry, courage, and strength. Chivalry refers to a caring attitude and a willingness to contribute and support those around them [17]. Courage describes a person's willingness to face problems and challenges bravely [18]. Strength refers to an individual's ability to persevere and overcome difficulties [19]. An antagonist is a character who creates obstacles and conflicts for the protagonist [20]. Typically, there is one main antagonist accompanied by other characters who hinder the protagonist's goals. Antagonists are generally portrayed through negative traits such as selfishness, manipulation, and cruelty. Selfishness refers to an attitude in which individuals consider themselves superior to others and prioritize their own interests [21]. Manipulation refers to deceptive behavior aimed at influencing or controlling others for personal gain [22]. Cruelty is characterized by a lack of compassion and a tendency to cause suffering to others. Therefore, individuals who behave dishonestly, deceitfully, cruelly, and greedily are often considered to possess negative character traits [23]. In conclusion, understanding personality traits provides a framework for comprehensively assessing and describing individual differences. These traits play a crucial role in shaping how individuals think, feel, and behave, ultimately influencing their interactions with others and their adaptation to the world around them.

Teaching English to students through character analysis of movies like The Huntsman: Winter's War is a fun and interesting approach to help them become more proficient readers and critical thinkers. Students can grow personally and academically by learning critical skills and expanding their literary comprehension by delving into the complexity of characters in visual narratives. Character analysis can be incorporated into English classes through discussions, essays, character profiles, storyboards, or acting out situations. This approach fosters creativity, empathy, and analytical abilities, ultimately enhancing the reading materials available in high school English textbooks.

The Huntsman: Winter's War can be viewed from an intercultural perspective because it portrays interactions among characters from different kingdoms, social backgrounds, and cultural traditions. The film highlights how differences in values, beliefs, communication styles, and customs influence relationships, cooperation, and conflict. *The Huntsman: Winter's War* illustrates that successful cooperation depends on understanding, respecting, and adapting to cultural differences, making it a useful example for discussing intercultural communication and teamwork.

The purpose of this research is to improve existing reading instruction in English textbooks at the high school level. One method is to utilize character depictions in films. The researchers chose The Huntsman: Winter's War because it contains educational values that can be used to develop textbooks, particularly for teaching reading.

Review of Related Literature

Character portrayal refers to how characters are presented, developed, and understood in a narrative through dialogue, actions, appearance, and interactions with other characters. In contemporary literary and narrative studies, character development is considered a central aspect of narrative analysis because it reflects psychological states, moral values, and social representations [24].

Mawar states that character portrayal in narrative texts, including films, can be analyzed through direct characterization, which involves explicit descriptions by the narrator or other characters, and indirect characterization, which is revealed through actions, speech, thoughts, and reactions [25]. Film narratives further reinforce characterization through visual and auditory elements such as facial expressions, body language, costumes, music, and cinematography, making film a powerful medium for character analysis.

Bordwell and Thompson state that films function as multimodal texts in which characterization is constructed not only linguistically but also visually and contextually [26]. This perspective aligns with the qualitative approach used in this study, in which characters' speech and actions are analyzed to reveal their traits and personalities.

In the context of *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, characterization plays a crucial role in distinguishing protagonists from antagonists. The portrayal of Eric as a hero and Freya as an antagonist demonstrates classic narrative archetypes that remain relevant in modern film narratives [27].

In narrative theory, characters are generally categorized as protagonists and antagonists based on their function in the story. Cattrysse explains that a protagonist is a character whose goal shapes the narrative's development, while an antagonist acts as a force that opposes or hinders that goal [28]. Modern literary studies also argue that the role of a protagonist is not only to be a good character but also to demonstrate values that can foster audience empathy [29]. Positive traits such as courage, strength, and chivalry are associated with protagonists in fantasy films because they represent moral ideals and resilience.

Conversely, antagonists are portrayed through negative traits such as selfishness, cruelty, and manipulateness [21]. Contemporary antagonists often possess psychological complexity; however, their actions continue to generate moral conflict in the narrative. Freya reflects a contemporary antagonist whose emotional trauma influences her cruel and manipulative behavior.

These differences in character portrayals provide a strong foundation for literary analysis in educational contexts, enabling students to critically examine the moral values, motivations, and conflicts presented in narrative texts. In recent years, films have increasingly been recognized as legitimate literary texts in English and Indonesian language teaching. Ismail argues that films provide authentic exposure to linguistic and cultural contexts, making them effective tools for developing reading and translation skills [30].

Films incorporate narrative structures, character development, and thematic elements similar to those found in written literature. Tomlinson states that audiovisual texts help learners grasp abstract concepts more easily because meaning is conveyed through a combination of visual, auditory, and verbal elements [31].

Furthermore, Kabooha found that the use of films in English classes can increase student motivation and improve vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension skills. When students engage with film summaries, scripts, or character descriptions, they practice reading in an engaging and meaningful context [32].

Reading instruction in contemporary pedagogy emphasizes critical and interpretive reading over surface comprehension. Grabe stated that effective reading instruction involves activating background knowledge, analyzing text structure, and interpreting content beyond its literal meaning [8].

Character analysis is an effective strategy for teaching reading because it encourages students to identify main ideas, infer meaning, and evaluate character motivations. Griffith emphasized that character analysis can improve students' inferential comprehension and critical thinking skills [33].

Using film-based character portrayals allows teachers to integrate pre-reading, in-reading, and post-reading activities. For example, reading a film synopsis before watching and analyzing character traits while reading can enhance comprehension, while reflective discussions after reading encourage critical engagement [34].

Character portrayal serves as a bridge between narrative comprehension and reading comprehension. Duke states that students comprehend texts more effectively when they can relate to characters and understand their emotional and moral dimensions [35].

Mu, B., et al. describe intercultural Research on intercultural competence—also known as cultural intelligence, global competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global citizenship, to name a few—has gained attention due to the increasing interconnectedness of our globalized world over the past few decades [28]. The film was also found in the form of the mirror of the film since every day. Additionally, and has been found in the everyday since every day. Analyzing characters in term of intercultural context is also important to know deeply the characterization connected with culture. By analyzing characters like Eric and Freya, students practice identifying descriptive language, recognizing deeper meanings, and interpreting narrative conflict. This process supports the development of higher-order reading skills required in the high school curriculum.

Therefore, using *The Huntsman: Winter's War* as a teaching resource can support reading instruction by integrating entertainment with academic analysis, thus encouraging students to develop a deeper understanding of literary texts.

2. METHOD

Creswell defines qualitative research as an approach used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to social or human problems [16]. Furthermore, Sugiyono states that qualitative methods are used to obtain in-depth data because the data contains meaning. This meaning represents the true value behind the collected data [17]. The purpose of qualitative research is to provide systematic descriptions and accurate facts. Therefore, this study uses qualitative research methods.

Arikunto explains that the unit of analysis is a specific unit used as the object of research. This study analyzes the film "The Huntsman: Winter's War" (2016). The unit of analysis is the depiction of the main characters through their actions, body language, and speech throughout the film [18].

According to Djamal, data are facts or realities in the form of objects, events, writings, or numbers that are intentionally collected through observation or other research techniques for the purpose of drawing conclusions. In this study, the data source is the film "The Huntsman: Winter's War" (2016) [19].

Sugiyono [17] states that the primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher themselves. Furthermore, Sugiyono emphasized that data collection techniques are crucial because the primary goal of the research is to obtain relevant data [17].

To analyze the data, the researchers followed the following procedures: Watched *The Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016) to gain an understanding of the overall story.

1. Searched for a summary of the movie from online sources.
2. Read the summary of *The Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016).
3. Collected the utterances, body language, and actions of the main characters that reflected their characteristics.

3. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to examine the application of character portrayal in films to reading instruction. This study describes the main characters in *The Huntsman: Winter's War*: Eric as the protagonist and Freya as the antagonist. The analysis shows that Eric is characterized by chivalry, courage, and strength. In contrast, Freya is depicted as selfish, manipulative, and cruel. These character traits provide valuable material for teaching reading and developing students' understanding of literary texts.

Table 1. Description of the Main Characters

No	Actors	Characteristics	Utterances	Minutes
1.	Eric	Knighthood Brave Strong	Knighthood "The boy and the girl, who are they and what's their names?" "Which one?" "The best twice" "Eric and Sara, my queen" "Two weeks ago, the queen ordered a detachment of soldiers to take the mirror to sanctuary. They never returned" "Wait, wait. I'm not your man" "You're the best tracker we have in the kingdom" Brave "She'll catch us or she won't. But either way, we shall be free. You do love me, don't you?" "Aye I do. I give you my life and my death. Stand of fall, I'll never leave your side, I swear it to you" Strong "You knew she'd betray you and you spared her still. Have you learnt my lesson at last?" "Harden your heart, Queen of Winter" "Bury the world in a tomb of ice. It matters not" "Love will endure" "Have you lost your mind? She betrayed us. Eric, she is not cupid" "I doubt that an arrow to the chest is an expression of her love"	15.01 29.15 21.25 1.15.28 1.17.23

2.	Freya	Selfish Manipulative Cruel	<i>Selfish</i> “Because in my kingdom, there is but one law”. “Do not love”. “It’s a sin, and I’ll not forgive it.”	12.13
			<i>Manipulative</i> “You abandoned her, Eric. But not I”	1.14.11
			<i>Cruel</i> “Kill him”	1.15.57

Table 2. the Intercultural Points Found in the Film

Intercultural Point	Evidence from the Film (Paraphrased Dialogue/Scene)
Leadership Style	Freya repeatedly commands her Huntsmen to suppress all emotions and obey her orders without question. Eric, however, encourages cooperation and mutual trust among his companions.
Love vs. Cultural Rules	Freya declares that love is forbidden because it leads to weakness and betrayal. Eric and Sara reject this belief and choose to remain loyal to one another despite the consequences.
Trust and Betrayal	After believing Sara has betrayed him, Eric later discovers that he was deceived by Freya's magic. Their reconciliation is based on open communication and restored trust.
Power Distance	Freya expects absolute obedience from everyone in her kingdom. Her soldiers rarely question her authority. Eric, on the other hand, is willing to challenge her decisions when he believes they are unjust.
Communication Style	Freya communicates primarily through direct commands and threats. Eric and Sara rely more on discussion, persuasion, and emotional support.
Gender Roles	Freya and Ravenna exercise political and military power as queens, while Sara serves as an elite warrior equal to male Huntsmen.

4. DISCUSSION

A. Character Depiction of the Character Eric and Freya

In this section, the researchers discuss the portrayal of the main characters in the film [20]. The main characters are Eric and Freya. Eric is portrayed as a brave, tough, and highly skilled warrior with exceptional strategic abilities. This characterization is illustrated at minute 15:01, when Freya asks her guard, “*Those boys and girls, who are they and what are their names?*” The guard replies, “*Which ones?*” Freya replies, “*The two best.*” The guard then replies, “Eric and Sara, my Queen.” This dialogue demonstrates that Eric is considered one of the most outstanding warriors in Freya’s kingdom. Furthermore, Eric is consistently entrusted with leading battles and repeatedly returns victorious, highlighting his competence, courage, and leadership qualities.

Another aspect of Eric's characterization is shown at 29:15, where a dialogue occurs between Eric and his best friend. At that moment, his best friend asks Eric for help finding a magic mirror that could be dangerous if it falls into the wrong hands. His best friend believes Eric is the most suitable person for the task because he is considered the best tracker in the kingdom.

Eric is also portrayed as a brave character, as demonstrated in a dialogue at minute 21:25 when he is speaking with his lover. During the conversation, Eric states that he will always remain by her side regardless of the circumstances or risks involved. This dialogue highlights Eric's bravery and loyalty, as he is willing to face any danger in order to protect and support the person he loves.

In addition to his strategic abilities and courage, Eric is also portrayed as a resilient character. This is demonstrated in the dialogues at 1:15:28 and 1:17:23, which convey the idea that love can overcome all obstacles, including evil. These scenes highlight Eric's determination and emotional strength in the face of adversity.

Freya is portrayed as a selfish, manipulative, and cruel character. These traits are illustrated in scenes that occur at minutes 12, 74, and 76. Her selfishness is demonstrated when she forbids her soldiers from falling in love due to the trauma she experienced from her own tragic romantic relationship. Furthermore, her manipulative nature is evident when she provokes Eric and his lover into hatred. Furthermore, her cruelty is depicted in the scene where she orders Eric's lover to kill her.

Based on the findings, Eric can be classified as the protagonist, whereas Freya can be classified as the antagonist. Eric’s characterization is reflected through his bravery, resilience, and strategic competence, while Freya’s characterization is evident in her selfishness, manipulateness, and cruelty.

B. Teaching Reading Using Character Depiction

To support reading instruction, teachers may use movies as learning materials through the following steps:

Movie Selection: Choose movies that are adaptations of literary works or films with rich character development. Select movies that remain faithful to the source material and provide nuanced portrayals of characters.

Pre-viewing Activities: Before watching the movie, introduce students to the characters, setting, and background of the story. Provide information about the author, historical context, and themes of the movie. Encourage students to predict how the characters may be portrayed based on their understanding of the text.

Movie Viewing: While watching the movie, encourage students to pay attention to how characters are portrayed through dialogue, actions, and visual elements. Provide viewing guides or graphic organizers to help students track character traits, relationships, and character development.

Comparative Analysis: After watching the movie, facilitate discussions comparing the portrayal of characters in the film with their representation in the original literary work. Encourage students to analyze similarities and differences in character traits, motivations, and character arcs.

Visual Analysis: Guide students in examining visual elements such as costumes, facial expressions, body language, and settings that contribute to character portrayal.

Critical Thinking Activities: Engage students in activities that require them to evaluate the interpretation of characters and complete writing tasks that reflect their understanding of the characters and the story presented in the movie.

C. Intercultural Points

Leadership Style, demonstrates the contrast between authoritarian and collaborative leadership styles, which vary across cultures. One of the most important cross-cultural themes in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is leadership. The key characters of the movie, especially Freya, Ravenna, and Eric, exhibit different leadership philosophies. The movie is a helpful tool for talking about intercultural communication and leadership in EFL classes since it shows how values, beliefs, and communication styles affect leadership: **Freya's Authoritarian Leadership**, Freya demonstrates an authoritarian or autocratic leadership style. After experiencing personal betrayal, she establishes a kingdom where love is forbidden and absolute obedience is expected. She believes that emotional attachment weakens individuals and therefore requires her Huntsmen to suppress their feelings and devote themselves entirely to her authority. Freya's leadership is characterized by: centralized decision-making strict rules and discipline; direct and commanding communication; reliance on fear and punishment to maintain control; and little opportunity for followers to express opinions or challenge authority. Her communication reflects a high power-distance relationship, where the leader possesses unquestionable authority and subordinates are expected to obey without resistance. This leadership style creates order and discipline but also generates fear, distrust, and emotional isolation among her followers. As a result, Eric and Sara eventually reject her authority because they value trust, love, and personal freedom over blind obedience. From an intercultural perspective, Freya's leadership resembles leadership practices found in societies where hierarchical relationships and obedience to authority are strongly emphasized. This provides an opportunity for students to discuss how leadership expectations differ across cultures;

Ravenna's Manipulative Leadership, Unlike Freya, Ravenna leads through **manipulation and personal ambition**. She uses persuasion, deception, and supernatural power to influence others and maintain her position. Rather than inspiring loyalty, she exploits people's weaknesses to achieve her own goals. The characteristics of Ravenna's leadership include: manipulation instead of collaboration; persuasive but deceptive communication; self-interest over collective welfare; exploitation of followers' emotions; and maintaining authority through intimidation. Her leadership illustrates how communication can be used unethically to influence others. In intercultural communication studies, Ravenna's behavior provides an example of how leaders may misuse persuasive communication when ethical values are absent:

Eric's Transformational Leadership, Eric represents a transformational and collaborative leadership style. Although he is not a king or formal leader, he gains the respect of others through courage, honesty, empathy, and responsibility. Rather than commanding people, Eric inspires them through his actions and willingness to protect others. Eric's leadership demonstrates: mutual trust between leader and followers; cooperation and teamwork; respect for individual opinions; empathy and emotional intelligence; ethical decision-making; and encouragement rather than coercion. Eric communicates openly with his companions and values discussion before making decisions. His leadership encourages participation, strengthens relationships, and motivates others to work together toward a shared goal. From an intercultural

perspective, Eric's leadership reflects characteristics commonly associated with low power-distance cultures, where leaders are viewed as facilitators rather than absolute authorities. Power Distance and leadership styles are intimately related, according to Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory [36]. Freya's realm represents a high power-distance society, where authority is concentrated in the monarch and followers rarely question choices. However, Eric's leadership emphasizes equality, involvement, and respect for one another, reflecting a lower power-distance attitude.

Love vs. Cultural Rules

Highlights how cultural norms can regulate personal relationships and how individuals may challenge those norms. One of the most significant intercultural themes in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is the conflict between love as a personal value and cultural rules imposed by authority. Although the film is set in a fantasy world, it portrays a social system in which cultural norms regulate individuals' emotions, relationships, and behavior. This theme provides a meaningful context for discussing how different societies establish cultural expectations regarding love, loyalty, and personal freedom.

Freya's Cultural Rule: Love Is Forbidden

After experiencing betrayal by her lover, Queen Freya concludes that love is the source of weakness and suffering. Consequently, she establishes a kingdom governed by a strict cultural rule: love is forbidden. All Huntsmen are raised under this rule and are expected to devote themselves entirely to military discipline and loyalty to the queen. In Freya's kingdom, love is not viewed as a private emotion but as a threat to social order and political control. Those who violate this rule face severe punishment. This illustrates how cultural norms can shape interpersonal relationships by defining which behaviors are acceptable and which are prohibited. From an intercultural communication perspective, Freya creates a rule-oriented culture, where conformity to collective expectations is valued above individual desires. Such systems emphasize obedience, emotional restraint, and loyalty to authority rather than personal autonomy.

Eric and Sara: Individual Values Challenge Cultural Norms

Eric and Sara represent the opposing perspective. Despite the prohibition, they develop a romantic relationship because they believe that love provides trust, courage, hope, and emotional support rather than weakness. Their relationship reflects the belief that individuals should have the freedom to make personal decisions based on their own values. Their resistance to Freya's rule demonstrates a conflict between: institutional authority and personal freedom; collective rules and individual choice; and fear-based control and mutual trust.

From an intercultural viewpoint, Eric and Sara explain that individuals may negotiate, challenge, or resist cultural expectations when those expectations collide with personal ideas or ethical standards. The conflict between Freya and the two protagonists reflects an important principle in intercultural communication: cultural values influence how people understand and express love. Across societies, expectations about romantic relationships, marriage, emotional expression, and family obligations differ considerably. Some cultures prioritize collective interests and social approval, whereas others place greater emphasis on individual happiness and personal choice. Cross-cultural research also shows that while love is a universal human experience, its meaning, expression, and associated norms vary across cultural contexts. From the perspective of intercultural communicative competence, this theme encourages students to examine how cultural rules influence communication, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. Rather than assuming that one approach is universally correct, students learn to recognize that different communities may establish different norms concerning emotional expression, loyalty, and social responsibility [37]

Trust and Betrayal

Shows that misunderstandings often result from incomplete information and that communication is essential for rebuilding relationships. Trust and betrayal are central themes in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* and significantly influence the development of the main characters and the progression of the story. Throughout the film, relationships are built, damaged, and restored through acts of trust, deception, loyalty, and forgiveness. These themes provide valuable opportunities to discuss interpersonal communication and intercultural communication because trust is a fundamental element of successful interaction across different social and cultural contexts. The relationship between Eric and Sara is initially built on mutual trust. As fellow Huntsmen, they depend on one another for survival during training and battle. Their trust extends beyond physical protection to emotional support, allowing them to form a romantic relationship despite Freya's prohibition of love.

Their relationship demonstrates that trust involves confidence in another person's honesty, loyalty, and commitment. In intercultural communication, trust enables individuals from different backgrounds to cooperate, exchange ideas, and build meaningful relationships. Without trust, communication becomes ineffective because individuals become reluctant to share information or depend on one another. The main conflict in the movie arises when Eric feels that Sara has deceived him. This miscommunication results from Freya's magical trickery, which distorts Eric's sense of reality, rather than from Sara's betrayal. Eric consequently becomes emotionally distant from Sara and loses faith in her. This incident demonstrates how interpersonal relationships can be seriously harmed by treachery, whether it is actual or perceived. Misunderstandings in cross-cultural contexts can also result from false information, cultural differences, preconceptions, or incorrect assumptions. Such situations often reduce trust and create impediments to good communication.

Recent study highlights that betrayal constitutes a violation of trust within relationships founded upon expectations of loyalty. But not all unfulfilled expectations qualify as betrayal; treachery only happens when a long-standing bond of loyalty is shattered [38].

Power Distance

Reflects differences between hierarchical (high power distance) and more egalitarian (low power distance) cultures. Power distance is one of the most prominent intercultural communication elements featured in *The Huntsman: Winter's War*. According to Geert Hofstede, power gap refers to the extent to which less powerful individuals of a society accept and expect that power is allocated unequally. High power distance cultures have hierarchical connections that are plainly upheld, leaders with unquestionable authority, and subordinates expected to submit without question. Conversely, low power distance cultures emphasize equality, involvement, and open communication between leaders and followers. The film portrays a striking contrast between these two views through the leadership of Freya and the actions of Eric and his buddies.

Freya's Kingdom as a High Power Distance Society

Freya establishes a kingdom in which authority is absolute and unquestionable. As queen, she exercises complete control over her Huntsmen by determining their rules, beliefs, and even their emotions. Her followers are expected to obey every command without expressing disagreement or questioning her decisions. Love is prohibited because Freya believes emotional attachment threatens discipline and weakens loyalty to the ruler.

This hierarchical structure reflects the characteristics of **high power distance**, where leaders possess legitimate authority and followers accept unequal power relationships as normal. Communication flows primarily from the leader to subordinates, leaving little opportunity for dialogue or shared decision-making. Contemporary research likewise notes that high power-distance environments often discourage employees or followers from speaking openly because authority is viewed as unquestionable, creating barriers to effective communication

Communication Under High Power Distance

Freya's communication style is predominantly **top-down**. She issues commands, establishes strict regulations, and expects immediate compliance. Her authority is reinforced through fear, magical power, and punishment rather than persuasion or collaboration.

The communication patterns in her kingdom are characterized by: one-way communication from leader to followers; limited opportunities to express opinions; unquestioning obedience; dependence on authority for decision-making; and emotional restraint to maintain discipline. Such communication reinforces social hierarchy but reduces openness and trust among members of the group. Research has shown that high power-distance beliefs may inhibit communication because individuals become reluctant to challenge authority or voice concerns [39]

a) Eric as a Representation of Lower Power Distance

Eric is an example of a different leadership style that is more in line with minimal power distance. Despite his extraordinary abilities and innate leadership qualities, he does not rely on intimidation or authority. Instead, he earns the respect of people through boldness, cooperation, honesty, and empathy.

Eric displays various qualities related with low power distance: promoting cooperation, hearing what others have to say, coming to decisions together, honoring each person's dignity, and fostering trust rather than fear. Eric, in contrast to Freya, thinks that leadership should bring people together rather than exert control over them. Instead of strict hierarchy, his relationships with Sara, Nion, and Gryff are built on respect and cooperation.

b) Conflict Between Hierarchy and Equality

The conflict between Freya and Eric represents more than a battle between good and evil; it symbolizes two contrasting views of authority.

Freya believes that: authority must never be questioned; discipline is maintained through fear; loyalty is achieved through obedience; and leaders possess superior status.

Eric believes that: trust is more effective than fear; followers deserve respect; cooperation strengthens leadership; and moral responsibility is more important than unquestioning obedience. This contrast allows students to examine how cultural values shape leadership, communication, and interpersonal relationships.

From the standpoint of intercultural communication, the movie shows how cultural preconceptions about hierarchy and authority affect communication patterns. Individuals raised in high power-distance situations may be less likely to question leaders, whereas individuals from lower power-distance environments are often more willing to express opinions and participate in decision-making.

According to recent studies on multicultural communication, variations in power distance have a major impact on participation, leadership, and communication efficacy. Large disparities in assumptions about hierarchy may weaken motivation, hinder open communication, and produce misunderstandings in multicultural contexts [40], [41], [42].

Communication Style

Illustrates the contrast between directive communication and relationship-oriented communication. Communication style is one of the most significant intercultural elements portrayed in *The Huntsman: Winter's War*. Throughout the film, the main characters communicate in different ways depending on their personalities, leadership roles, emotions, and relationships. Their verbal and non-verbal communication reflects different values and approaches to authority, trust, conflict, and cooperation. From an intercultural communication perspective, these differences demonstrate that communication is influenced not only by language but also by cultural expectations, social hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships.

Freya's Direct and Authoritative Communication Style

Queen Freya consistently uses a **direct, formal, and authoritative communication style**. As the ruler of her kingdom, she communicates primarily through commands, warnings, and prohibitions. Her messages are explicit, leaving little room for negotiation or interpretation. She expects immediate obedience from her Huntsmen and rarely invites dialogue or alternative viewpoints.

The characteristics of Freya's communication include: direct instructions and commands; one-way communication; formal language reflecting authority; emotional restraint; and communication intended to maintain control rather than build relationships.

From an intercultural communication perspective, Freya's communication reflects a high power-distance orientation, where leaders possess unquestioned authority and followers are expected to comply. Such communication emphasizes hierarchy and social order rather than collaboration.

Eric's Supportive and Collaborative Communication Style

In contrast, Eric demonstrates a **supportive and interpersonal communication style**. Rather than relying on authority, he communicates through encouragement, discussion, and mutual respect. He listens to others, considers different opinions, and frequently uses communication to strengthen relationships rather than dominate them.

Eric's communication is characterized by: openness and honesty; active listening; emotional expression; persuasive rather than coercive language; and collaborative problem-solving. His interactions with Sara and his companions show that effective communication depends on trust, empathy, and shared understanding. This communication style encourages cooperation and reflects characteristics commonly associated with **low power-distance** and relationship-oriented communication.

C. Sara's Emotional and Empathetic Communication

Sara often communicates through empathy and emotional openness. She expresses concern for others, openly shares her feelings, and attempts to resolve conflicts through understanding rather than aggression.

Her communication style illustrates that non-verbal communication—including facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and tone of voice—is equally important in conveying meaning. During emotional scenes, much of Sara's message is communicated through body language rather than spoken words. This reflects contemporary intercultural communication research emphasizing that successful interaction depends on integrating both verbal and non-verbal cues to interpret meaning accurately.

Ravenna's Manipulative Communication Style

Unlike Eric and Sara, Ravenna uses communication strategically to influence others. She persuades, deceives, and manipulates by exploiting people's fears, desires, and weaknesses.

Her communication demonstrates: persuasive language; deception; strategic emotional manipulation; indirect influence; and communication designed to achieve personal goals.

Rather than creating mutual understanding, Ravenna uses communication to gain power. This provides an opportunity for students to discuss the ethical dimensions of communication and the importance of honesty in intercultural relationships.

Scholars of intercultural communication stress that cultural differences in expectations for civility, authority, emotional expression, and engagement lead to cultural differences in communication methods. Therefore, interactional competence—the capacity to modify communication in accordance with interpersonal and cultural contexts—is necessary for effective intercultural communication [43].

Within the film: Freya signifies control-oriented communication. Eric represents relationship-oriented communication. Sara is a symbol of compassionate communication. Ravenna is a symbol of deceptive communication.

Gender Roles

Challenges traditional gender stereotypes by presenting women in positions of leadership and combat. One of the most important intercultural issues in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is gender roles. This movie depicts both male and female characters as significant players in the political, military, and interpersonal domains, in contrast to many conventional fantasy movies that feature men as heroes and women as submissive figures. Through characters such as Freya, Ravenna, Sara, and Eric, the film questions conventional gender stereotypes while also highlighting how power, identity, and communication create gender roles. From the standpoint of intercultural communication, these depictions inspire students to consider how various cultures create standards of masculinity and femininity.

Sara as an Independent Female Warrior

Sara represents another important example of changing gender roles. She is not portrayed as a passive princess waiting to be rescued but as an elite Huntsman with exceptional combat skills, intelligence, and resilience. Throughout the film, Sara contributes equally to battles, strategic planning, and problem-solving.

Her character reflects several contemporary perspectives on gender equality: women can perform roles traditionally associated with men; competence is determined by ability rather than gender; courage and leadership are not exclusively masculine qualities; and cooperation between men and women produces more effective outcomes.

Sara's relationship with Eric is also characterized by mutual respect. Although Eric protects her on several occasions, Sara likewise protects Eric, demonstrating reciprocity rather than dependence.

Eric and Positive Masculinity

Eric represents a form of **positive masculinity** that differs from traditional stereotypes emphasizing emotional dominance or aggression. While he is physically strong and courageous, he also demonstrates empathy, compassion, honesty, and emotional openness.

His character illustrates that masculinity may include: protecting others without controlling them; expressing affection and vulnerability; respecting women's autonomy; cooperating instead of dominating; and making ethical decisions based on compassion rather than force. From an intercultural communication perspective, Eric's communication style reflects mutual respect and equality, suggesting that effective relationships are based on dialogue rather than gender hierarchy.

Communication and Gender Roles

The interactions among the main characters demonstrate that gender influences communication, but it does not determine communication competence. Freya communicates through authority and command, Sara through empathy and cooperation, Ravenna through persuasion and manipulation, and Eric through collaboration and trust.

These contrasting communication styles illustrate that: leadership communication is shaped more by personality and values than by gender; both men and women can employ supportive or authoritarian communication; communication competence depends on empathy, respect, and ethical interaction; and stereotypes about masculine and feminine communication are not always supported by the characters' behaviors.

Current intercultural communication research emphasizes that gender should not be viewed as a fixed determinant of communication ability. Instead, communication practices are shaped by social experiences, cultural expectations, and intercultural interaction. Rich intercultural experiences can reduce stereotypical assumptions about gender and improve intercultural competence [44].

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, using character analysis in films can significantly enhance English language teaching by engaging students and expanding their understanding of literary themes. Through examining character traits, motivations, and conflicts, character analysis can foster empathy and critical thinking. Students can explore themes of power, deception, and redemption through films like *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, which feature diverse characters with complex motivations and relationships. By incorporating character analysis into English lessons, students can develop not only their language skills but also their analytical, creative, and empathic abilities. Activities such as writing essays, creating storyboards, developing character profiles, and participating in discussions can support this process. Therefore, this approach is highly effective for teaching reading skills, as it encourages engagement with literary characters while promoting critical interpretation and deeper understanding of the text.

The analysis of *The Huntsman: Winter's War* demonstrates that the film contains a variety of intercultural themes that can support the development of intercultural communicative competence. Although set in a fantasy world, the film reflects universal cultural values through its portrayal of leadership, communication styles, power distance, trust and betrayal, love versus cultural rules, and gender roles. These themes illustrate how cultural beliefs and social norms influence individuals' behaviors, relationships, and communication.

From an educational perspective, the film provides meaningful opportunities for students to analyze cultural differences, compare the values represented in the story with those of their own culture, and develop critical cultural awareness. By examining the characters' interactions and decision-making, students can improve not only their English reading and discussion skills but also their understanding of how communication is shaped by cultural values. Therefore, *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is an effective teaching resource for integrating language learning with intercultural communication in EFL classrooms.

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