

## Exploring the Role of Cultural Schemata in Bridging the Gap between People

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the hypothesis proposing "Cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins". The researchers have adopted the quantitative and qualitative methods as well as the questionnaire (50) and interview (10) as the tools for collecting data relevant to the study. It is an attempt to bring to the light the importance of cultural schemata in bridging the gap between the people. The sample of this study is comprised of 70 people who did not share the same cultural background and they were descended from different cultural background. The marks obtained from the questionnaire and interviews were compared. The results have revealed that the cultural schemata play a great role in bridging the gap between the people positively. Accordingly, the results have shown that there are strong equivalences among the people who descended from different cultural background. As a result, more space should be given to those people to bridge the gap between themselves and others in terms of social interaction, transferring the meaning of lexicons of concerned people's language, strengthening the relationship and knowledge of the world.

### 1. Introduction

People everywhere travel from place to place for different reasons. People leave their countries for the sake of education or working to generate money to improve their standards of living. As you see, people come from different countries to the Gulf countries to achieve their targets. Most of those people are immigrants. They have different background and origins, cultures and ethnics. Those people face difficulties in communicating with themselves and others. It is very difficult for those people to understand each other. It is not easy for them to engage themselves to do something together, because they may find challenges such as social interaction, finding common ground of work and strengthening relationship. Therefore, cultural schemata may find its way to solve these challenges. There are multiple reasons for one to go overseas to obtain a higher degree. As stated by Trice (2001), many developing countries do not have an adequate higher education infrastructure to support their growing educational needs and they encourage students with the means to seek degrees elsewhere. Besides meeting their personal needs of academic and professional fulfillment, people choose to go abroad. Moreover, exchanging culture and learning a different language also serves to internationalize higher education as students increasingly go abroad to gain richer life experiences.

#### 1.1 Aims and Scope of the Study

This study aims to investigate the hypothesis proposing "Cultural schemata to bridge the gap between people of different origins". The scope of this study was limited to the people who did not share the same cultural background. There were different nationalities that have been exposed to this study which was conducted in Abha city at Khamees Mishait Central Market at Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where those people descending from different cultural background identities were gathered together. The researchers have noticed that there was inter-textual gap between the people who descended from different cultural

background origins. Therefore, this study was made to explore the challenges that people encountered while bridging the gap between them.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Cultural Schemata (CS)**

One of the early reports of the influence of Cultural Schemata (CS) is that of Bartlett (1932), reporting observations of how Englishmen read and recalled stories from North American Indian folk tales. Bartlett recognized that when readers process unfamiliar text manifestations the cultural differences in schemata are evident. Fifty years later, Kintsch and Greene (1978) presented American college students with two stories: one a Grimm fairy tale, the other an Apache folk tale. Recall protocols indicated that the American students better recalled the Brothers Grimm story than the Apache folk tale. Carrell (1983b) noted that this experiment confounded form and content of schemata. As Steffensen, Joag-Dev, and Anderson (1979) pointed out, Kintsch and Greene did not require American Indian readers to read both stories. So, Steffensen et al. (1979) designed a more intricate study in which American and Indian university students read two letters one of which was about a wedding in each of the countries America and India. Free and probed recall data indicated the influence of cultural schemata on reading both letters. Readers distorted information contained in letters referring to unfamiliar cultures and recalled more relevant units of ideas from the letters referring to their own cultures.

### **2.2 Reading Comprehension**

A related study by Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, and Anderson (1981) documented similar phenomena in the Reading Comprehension (RC) of urban Black and agrarian white eighth graders, who read a letter about an incident in the school cafeteria; the letter included quotations of ritual insults (playing the dozens) commonly found in the Black community. While the urban Black readers readily comprehended the passage and recognized the sounding/playing the dozens, the white agrarian students interpreted the events in the cafeteria to include physical aggression, thus, distorting the intended meaning of the events in the letter. Subsequent evaluation of the protocol data from these three experiments revealed that there is a close interrelationship of crosscultural schemata, register, and cohesion in second culture reading comprehension (Steffensen, 1981). These experiments by Steffensen and associates are themselves strong arguments for the roles of cultural and discourse factors in the reading process. Cultural knowledge cannot be ignored in a model of reading.

While much cultural schemata research is conducted with adult subjects, only a few studies examined cross-cultural variables in the reading comprehension of elementary school children. In addition to the previously mentioned Reynolds et al. (1981) study, which used free and probed recall data, a more recent study (Andersson, 1981; Andersson & Gipe, 1983) used probed questioning to determine the role of variables of creativity and cultural schemata on inferential reading comprehension by sixth-grade children from New Orleans and New York metropolitan areas. Andersson constructed 24 short passages, each controlled for story structure. Six of the passages contained cultural and religious content familiar to New Orleans area Catholic children, six passages contained cultural and religious content familiar to New York Greek Orthodox children, six passages contained information generally known to all children, and six passages contained information generally unknown to everyone.

According to Andersson (1981), students in the New Orleans area were familiar with Mardi Gras, crawfish boils, the French Quarter, streetcars, All Saints' Day, and Jackson Square. The New York participants, who had been reared in the Greek traditions of their families, were familiar with Nameday celebrations, Greek Independent Day events, 40-day memorial services, Greek.

### **2.3 Cultural Schemata and Language**

There is a slow growing body of literature examining the role of schemata in second language comprehension. These ESL studies followed experimental research paradigms in schema theory with protocol data of nonnative English-speaking subjects. Johnson (1981, 1982) investigated the role of background knowledge in reading performance of university level ESL students. In the first study, Johnson (1981) examined the potential interaction of language complexity and cultural background in the reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate/advanced ESL students and American English-speaking subjects, all of whom read stories from Iranian and American folklore. Two versions of each story were also constructed by varying the syntactic complexity (simplified syntax vs. more complex syntax). One half of each cultural group read the simplified texts of stories from both cultures. The other half read the syntactically more complex texts. Johnson concluded that (a) language complexity did not have as much an effect on the Iranian subjects' comprehension as cultural origin of the text. (This finding about the role of cultural origin of text is also confirmed by Carrell [1981b] with Japanese and Chinese subjects, who read Japanese, French, and Apache Indian folk tales.) (b) Native readers were influenced by both language complexity and cultural origin of the text, (c) Both cultural groups recalled a similar number of implicit propositions; yet, subjects made more cultural inferences/elaborations in the recall of the text from their own culture. This study documents the interaction of language and culture in text comprehension.

### **2.4 Second Language Reading Process (SLRP)**

Carrell (1983c) further illustrates the interactive nature of the Second Language Reading process (SLR). Carrell investigated the effects of three aspects of background knowledge (context, transparency, and familiarity) in the reading comprehension of three groups of readers (native English speakers, advanced ESL readers, and high intermediate learners), all of whom read passages such as variations of the balloon and laundry passages of Bransford and Johnson (1972). Within the context variable, subjects read the passage either with a title and picture or with no context (context vs. no context); within the transparency variable, passage variations either contained or did not contain lexical items critical to comprehending the text (transparent vs. opaque); within the familiarity variable, there was either the presence or absence of schemata in the reader (familiar vs. novel). Significant effects were found for the three variables of background knowledge. In general, Carrell found that nonnative English readers were less efficient at using contextual and textual clues in reading. Yet, advanced ESL readers recalled novel text better than familiar text. For a similar experiment, see Carrell and Wallace (1983).

These studies clearly demonstrate the interactive nature of second language reading, as schemata, context, and language are critical variables in a model of first and second language reading. These studies primarily examined adult subjects. Future studies need to examine the interaction of language and schemata in children's development of reading. Nonetheless, the studies on cross-cultural schemata in a first and second language can be used to argue that culture and language factors are crucial factors in a model of reading. It appears to be the case that prior knowledge interacts with language proficiency.

### **3. Methodology of the Study: Introduction**

This part is concerned with the methodology of the study. A detailed description of the subject and setting has provided the design of the instrument, procedure of data collection and the method of the data analysis. In addition, validity and reliability of the questionnaire and interview are presented.

#### **3.1 Subjects**

The subject of this study was comprised of (50) + (10) people who did not share the same cultural background and they were descended from different cultural background origins. Those people were randomly selected because they did not have the same cultural background in terms of their mothers' tongue and nationalities but they have the same educational background. English language is the second language of most of them.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

The researchers have used the quantitative and qualitative methods as well as the questionnaire and the interview as tools to collect information and data relevant to this study.

#### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

Questionnaire was given to (50) respondents who represented the people who did not share the same cultural background origins, and interview was given to 10 respondents who represented the random community sample who descended from different cultural background nationalities.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

This part is devoted to the analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the data collected through the questionnaire and interview.

### **4. Results**

The following is an analytical interpretation and discussion of the findings regarding different points related to the objectives and hypotheses of the study. Each item in the questionnaire was statistically analyzed and discussed, as shown in the following tables.

#### **4.1 Analysis of the questionnaire**

Now, let us turn to analyze the questionnaire. All Tables have shown the scores assigned to each of the 8 statements by the (50) respondents.

##### **Statement (1)**

Table (1) Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the social interaction of the concerned people.

Valid	Frequency	Percent (%)
strongly agree	11	25
Agree	30	58
Neutral(no opinion)	4	07
Disagree	5	10
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	50	100.0

Table (1) above shows that a majority of the respondents (83%) Strongly agree and agree that most people should not be isolated from each other. Only 10% do not agree to the statement that cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the social interaction of the concerned people.

#### **Statement (2)**

Table (2) Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the lexicons of the concerned people.

Valid	Frequency	Percent (%)
strongly agree	6	12
Agree	23	48
Neutral(no opinion)	16	26
Disagree	5	14
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	50	100.0

Table (2) above shows that a majority of the respondent (60%) Strongly agree and agree that most people should know the semantics and syntactic structure of the concerned people's language system. Only 14% do not agree to the statement that cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the lexicons of the concerned people.

#### **Statement (3)**

Table (3) Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the culture of the concerned people.

Valid	Frequency	Percent (%)
strongly agree	11	22
Agree	20	36
Neutral(no opinion)	5	13
Disagree	14	29
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	50	100.0

Table (3) above explains that the majority of the respondents (58%) strongly agree and agree that most people are in need of face to face meeting to bridge the gap between them. Only 29% do not agree to the statement that cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to understand the culture of the concerned people.

#### **Statement (4)**

Table (4) Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to strengthen the relationship among the people of the world.

Valid	Frequency	Percent (%)
strongly agree	5	10
Agree	23	43
Neutral (no opinion)	12	26
Disagree	10	21
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	50	100.0

Table (4) above shows that a majority of the respondents (53%) strongly agree and agree that most people are in need of transferring knowledge from each other to strengthen themselves. Only 21% do not agree to the statement that Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to strengthen the relationship among the people of the world.

#### Statement (5)

Table (5) Cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to strengthen the awareness of the knowledge of the world among the people.

Valid	Frequency	Percent (%)
strongly agree	06	15
Agree	20	38
Neutral(no opinion)	15	28
Disagree	09	19
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	50	100.0

Table (5) above shows that the majority of the respondents (53%) strongly agree and agree that most people should be updated to what is going around them. Only 19% do not agree to the statement that cultural schemata helps the people, who descended from different cultural background origins, to strengthen the awareness of the knowledge of the world among the people.

#### The Highest and Lowest Agreement through the People Responses

As seen from the above tables, the statements in all sections obtained the highest mean of agreement given by the people who descended from different origins. In other words, these statements scored a percentage of 61.4% agreement among the people who descended from different origins. This gives evidence that the people who descended from different origins (respondents) were in total agreement with the concept that most people do not understand the cultural schemata critically. Most people do not understand the meaning of lexicons of the concerned people's language effectively. Most people are in need of social interaction, strength of relationship and knowledge of the world among themselves and others positively.

This indicates the importance of cultural schemata in bridging the gap between the concerned people along with highlighting the challenges in understanding of cultural schemata.

#### The Highest and Lowest Disagreement through the People Responses

Some statements gave the highest disagreement and lowest percentage – with a percentage of 18.4 %. It disagrees with the idea of pleasure and benefit which demonstrate that most people do not understand the cultural schemata critically; Most people do not understand the meaning of lexicons effectively; Most people should increase their knowledge of the world to update their knowledge positively.

#### 4.2 Analysis of the Interview

The responses to the interview of the 10 expertise interviewees, who descended from different origins, were tabulated and computed. The following are an analytical interpretation and discussion of the findings regarding different points related to the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Each question in the interview is analyzed statistically and discussed. The following table will support the discussion.

### Analysis of Expertise People's Interview

Questions	Question One		Question Two		Question Three		Question Four		Question Five	
<b>10</b>	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<b>Frequencies</b>	3	7	6	4	7	3	3	7	7	3
<b>Percentages</b>	30%	70%	60%	40%	70%	30%	30%	70%	70%	30%

#### Question One

The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the sample that is concerned with the questions and shows that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (30%). This justifies that most people are in need of understanding the cultural schemata.

#### Question Two

The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that is concerned with the questions and show that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (60%). This justifies that cultural schemata are too difficult to be understood by majority of people.

#### Question Three

The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that is concerned with the questions and show that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (70%). This justifies that cultural schemata addresses the majority of people's mind.

#### Question Four

The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that is concerned with the questions and show that some of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (30%). This justifies that some people intendedly abused the cultural schemata to save their own purposes.

#### Question Five

The table above illustrates the percentage and frequency of the answers of the study sample that is concerned with the questions and show that most of the sample answers were positive which are represented by the percentage (70%). This justifies that the majority of people are in bad need of interpreting the cultural schemata.

### 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the findings of this study revealed that all sections justify 'the need for cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins' which was highly rated by the people who descended from different origins.

We can say there was a consensus of opinions in favor of investigating the importance of cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins towards people's social interaction, providing common ground among the concerned people towards each other.

The neutral responses, however, show irregularity, and unexpected and unexplainable instability of the respondents' uncertainty in all hypotheses.

The responses to all statements in terms of cultural schemata proved the need to bridge the gap between the people of different origins. All statements are positive in these sections being either strongly agreed or only agreed.

The percentages of the negative responses were less significant for cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins, but higher for the people who descended from different origins.

All people who descended from different origins agreed to all the statements of the sections "the role of cultural schemata can bridge the gap between the people of different origins". The undecided responses, however, showed small differences.

The majority of the respondents were in favor of the statement that cultural schemata can bridge the gap between the people of different origins. A very large majority of the respondents agreed on:

- the importance of helping the people who descended from different origins to acquaint with cultural schemata;
- the fact that evaluation increases awareness of teachers' cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins;

- c. the urgent need for cultural schemata especially for explaining and understanding of the difficult areas in the concerned people's culture;
- d. Necessity for people to know their cultural schemata to bridge the gap between the people of different origins

When the people who descended from different origins were compared among themselves, no statistically significant differences were perceivable, stating that the teachers have no opportunity for understanding cultural schemata.

However, the people who descended from different origins confirm that understanding cultural schemata should be one of the main means of improving people who descended from different origins who were in favor of the use of cultural schemata in the target language so as to achieve the maximum efficiency in understanding cultural schemata of the concerned people..

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