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## Role of English Literature and Local Literature in English for Learning English as L2: A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

This study critically investigates the role that a text of English literature plays, in comparison with the local literary text in English, in the learning of English as a second language. To provide data for this research, two literary texts are selected and targeted: 'Araby' by James Joyce and 'The New Constitution' by Sadat Hassan Manto, a Pakistani short story writer. This analysis is based upon the perceptions and prescriptions of Piaget's world known schema theory which reads that to comprehend and understand a social product fully, the langue (mental lexicon of a speech community) and socialization in the relevant culture are necessary.

The analysis is conducted on the lexical, idiomatic, phrasal, clausal and the discourse levels.

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Teaching and learning English as a second language through literary text is always considered an important phenomenon in Pakistan and the subcontinent. In that context, this research is very useful because we may be able to identify which of the two literary texts is more effective for the non-native learners like Pakistanis in learning English.

**Key Words:** Schema Theory, Role of Local Literature in English, Learning English as L2

## **Introduction**

Saussure's contribution towards modernization of linguistics led to the emergence of so many new theories in the field of language studies which not only introduced far-reaching developments in the discipline concerned but also expanded the discipline to come in close contact with several areas. His concept of *langue* stands for the presence of a collective mental lexicon of a speech community from which its speakers acquire the linguistic material to produce utterances called *parole*. This mechanism of language system embedded in the conscious of the speakers enables them to communicate with each other and understand the social and cultural products of a population.

This idea of Saussure was further developed by Jean Piaget as a schema theory. This Swiss philosopher believes that the socialization of a person in a particular culture equips him or her with a body of knowledge, information and skills to comprehend the social, political, artistic and cultural products of that setting. This pre-existing store of knowledge that has harmonies with Saussure's *langue* phenomenon is in fact a tool in the hands of the speakers to grasp the culture of which he is a part. In a broader sense, schema theory holds that to understand a culture the schema of that culture is necessary. If we try to understand a cultural product with the help of an

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already existing body of knowledge that belongs to the other culture, we will not be able to comprehend the product properly and fully.

McKay (2003) holds that the role of the culture is unavoidably essential both in the learning and teaching of a language. Politzer (1959) is of the view that a language is steeped in the culture that produced it.

There are chances that we misunderstand the product if we apply to it the schema that belongs to the other culture.

### **Research Method Adopted**

The present researcher who has been teaching English language and English literature for years to the students at the college level in Pakistan does appreciate the schema theory of Piaget. It is his hypothesis that he developed over a period of time that for the Pakistani students, who are desirous to learn English through literature, the study of local literature written in English is more helpful than English literature. Reason is simple. The Pakistani schema helps the learner in many ways to grasp the Pakistani product.

To test this hypothesis, the present study is undertaken. *Araby*, a short story by James Joyce, an Irish novelist of the previous century, and *The New Constitution*, a story by a Pakistani literary writer Manto, are selected for providing data to the research. Using the medium of English, the researcher taught both the stories to a B.A. class consisting of fifty students. Then five students of the class - role number ten, twenty, thirty, forty and fifty - were selected to provide their reaction and response to the various questions set in the question paper. The six questions - the cause of low spiritedness of the hero at the start of the story, fill in the blanks,

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explanation of idiomatic phrases, meanings of culture-specific words, comprehension of adjectival phrases and summary of the story - are similar in character and are also relevant to both of the above mentioned short stories. Then these answers were analysed to reach the conclusion that is presented in the form of results and recommendations at the end of the research process. To meet the sense of comprehensiveness and thoroughness of research, each response of every respondent is analysed individually.

### **Data Analysis**

*Araby* is one of the stories from *Dubliners* that James Joyce wrote in 1914 about the stagnant and paralysed life of the middle class individuals living in Dublin at that time. *The New Constitution* is a short story by a post-colonial Pakistani writer Manto. It depicts the brutal behaviour of the British soldiers towards the locals some years ahead the independence of Pakistan and India in 1947. It deals with desires and reactions of the local Indians against the cruel foreign rulers. These two stories taken from different cultures are targeted to render data for the present research.

### **Question No. 1**

While responding to the first question of the paper that is ‘Why the hero is upset at the start of the story?’ the respondents produced very interesting material. Each of the five respondents holds that Mangu, the hero of the post-colonial story by Manto, is upset because the British soldiers did beat him for his rebellious instincts against the ruling colonisers. This poor *tangawala* of Lahore feels helpless before the roaring pride of the colonial masters in the British India. The answer is correct.

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On the other hand, all the respondents posit that the teenage hero of *Araby* is upset at the inception of the writing as he is in true love with a girl of his vicinity but the girl is not responding to his love. All these students are mistaken in their understanding of the cause of despair of the hero. In fact, Joyce intended, in the story under discussion, to distinguish between the teenage attachment for the opposite sex called ‘foolish blood’ and love that is a mature and honorable passion of humans. The hero in the story remains confused for a long time about the nature of his emotional and crudely powerful attachment for a girl. Then suddenly he comes to know that he is in love with a girl of the locality. Facts are quite strange.

Our respondents failed to judge the real cause of the emotional attachment of the boy because their Pakistani schema did not support them. In fact, in our culture it is generally believed that those girls and boys who remain playmates for a considerable period of time are expected to fall into love with each other and ultimately their sound love culminates in their marriage. Even the film, drama and folk literature appear in support of this thought. There are so many epic stories in the traditional culture of Pakistan where lovers fall in love with each other from the start of their life. That is why the local respondents produced their mistaken answers. The local schema misguided them in the understanding of a cultural product of the Irish society. These learners of English as second language did not make any mistake while interpreting the story that is taken from their ‘own society’ because their schema was relevant to the story.

## **Question No. 2**

Second question put before the participants was again to test their knowledge about general information regarding the narrative and the characters in it. Five items of the typical

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question of ‘Fill in the blanks’ were addressed by the students in different ways. Each of the five blank spaces, with reference to Manto’s short story under discussion, was filled correctly by four out of five respondents; only one out of five students filled two out of five spaces wrongly. His three out of five responses were correct. As far as the responses to the empty slots regarding the story by Joyce are concerned, three out of five students provided correct reply to two out of five spaces. Their responses to three items of the ‘fill in blanks’ were wrong. While attempting the question, the remaining two respondents could not provide even a single correct answer.

Again the interpretation of this data pulls us to the direction of Piglet’s theory of schema. This question of empty spaces is also linked with the cultural schema. The participants supported by their own cultural and social knowledge remained correct in providing replies to the blank spaces prepared on Manto’s story as they are historically well aware of the British cruelties that were imposed upon their forefathers before Pakistan got freedom. This post-colonial short fiction is seen by the students as their ‘own literature’. That is why they quite successfully respond to the empty slot in ‘Ustad Mangu hated the---’. They provide ‘the British’ to the empty space. They are fully conscious of the Punjabi characters like Mangu in the state of anger and depression. On the other hand their cultural schema that is foreign to *Araby* generally remains irrelevant to their competence to provide correct material to fill in the slots.

Mangu is an illiterate *tangawala* in Lahore who usually moves on the Mall to transport passengers from one place to the other place. One day a British soldier asked him to carry him to a bazaar where girls dance. The tangawala demanded five rupee as fare. The *gora* soldier thrashed him badly. The poor Punjabi who is a colonized entity could not respond to the colonizer in the same manner as the law in the British Raj would not support him in the court.

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Mangu, when he is among his friends at the *tanga* stand, abuses the illegal occupants of India-the English. One day he hears from the students of Government College Lahore, who travel on his tanga, that a new constitution is at hand and that it would give equal rights to the Indians along with the Britishers. That is why he is very happy when he comes back to his friends. He happily tells them that the days of their slavery are gone because the new constitution is a message of independence to them. One question was set in this context.

### **Question No. 3**

The third question asked was to explain an idiomatic expression ‘Mangu was in seventh heaven’. All of the respondents provided the correct answer. Words were different but the sense was similar. On the other hand their explanation of the idiomatic expression ‘we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottage to the back doors’ was wrong. All the students failed to comprehend its sense. Answer to this situation is again the result of that assistance that we get from our schema to understand a cultural product. We, the Pakistanis, can understand quite easily what is meant by ‘seventh heaven’ and the Western schema is unknown to such type of things. Our respondents have their Pakistani schema with them that works as a weapon in their hands to grasp the artistic pieces of their own culture but it cannot be a real help to them in the interpretation of *Araby*. Only the Western schema can help the reader grasp the meanings of an expression linked with the Western culture.

### **Question No. 4**

In each of the two stories there is the presence of proper nouns. And the next question was to test the general understanding of the participants in this regard. They were asked to

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explain the word ‘Anarkali’, used in Manto’s story under analysis, and the lexical item ‘Araby’, used in Joyce’ story. All of the respondents explained Anarkali in terms of a market of Lahore. In the same way all of the participants called Araby as a market of England. They are correct in their response to Anarkali but they are incorrect when they label Araby as a market of the West. Their applying of the local schema to the interpretation of the word Araby is faulty.

### **Question No. 5**

The next question was to explain the underlined phrases in the clauses taken from both the stories. All the respondents explained ‘human monkeys’, an expression taken from *The New Constitution*, correctly as the white men of English Raj in India. On the other hand all the respondents explained ‘went marketing’ - a phrase from *Araby* - as ‘went to market’. It is the incorrect explanation. In fact ‘went marketing’ stands for a salesman’s going to the market for marketing a product. The local schema of the Pakistani respondents and learners of English as L2 could not help them; rather it misguided them in the given interpretation.

### **Question No. 6**

The last question was to write the summary of the stories. The learners made a lot of grammatical mistakes and also wrongly understood and explained the theme of Joyce’ story under discussion. On the other hand the participants made a few mistakes of grammar and correctly understood and elucidated the central idea of Manto’s story under analysis.

The analysed data quite clearly proves that the Pakistani learners of English through English literature felt a lot of problems in the process, usually misunderstood the theme, failed to



comprehend the phrasal usage of language because their local schema provided them with wrong information at the crucial points of the reading of *Araby*. On the other hand, the respondents mostly comprehended and explained the questions set on *The New Constitution* in a positive way as their 'Pakistani schema' proved very helpful to them.

## **Conclusion**

The research conducted to analyse the comparative role of English literature and local/Pakistani literature written in English in the context of learning English as second language produced very significant results. It is proved that to understand an artistic product easily, properly and fully, knowledge of that culture is very important. Keeping this notion in mind Piaget presented the theory of schema, pre-existing body of knowledge. When a writer composes a piece of literature, his/her sensibility derives its strength from the language of that culture that is a common super-ordinate for all the individuals socialized in the milieu of this culture. That is why it is very easy to understand a product relevant to our schema. But when we try to understand a product of some other culture with the help of our 'own' schema, the results are not encouraging.

It also happens sometimes that we sometimes misinterpret a foreign product when we apply our native body of knowledge to it. The respondents of this research are at ease in the understanding of *The New Constitution* but they feel a lot of problems and difficulties while trying to understand *Araby*.

Learning and teaching of English as a second language is an important phenomenon and a clear reality in a country like Pakistan. The Third World feels the necessity to learn English. For this purpose various techniques are adopted. One of them is to learn/teach it through

literature. In this regard, to learn and teach English through local literature in English is a better choice.

There are many areas which still lie untapped in this realm of research. For example, the role of local proverbs, the local idioms, common words of English that circulate in the Pakistan society, and the style of Pakistani writers in local literature in English are still to be brought under the research net. Structure and patterns of the syntactic material of Pakistan literature in English, the collocational patterns of the Pakistani English in literature, the use of local lexical items, are some of the other areas that still lie untapped for research.

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### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### THE NEW CONSTITUTION

(Saadat Hassan Manto)

Name of the student-----

Answer the following questions.

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**Q 1** Why the hero is upset at the start of the story?

**Q 2** Fill in the blanks.

- (a) Ustad Mangu hated-----
- (b) Hindus and----- keep slashing each other every day.
- (c) Three days later he picked up three students from Government-----
- (d) ...he hated them because they were ruling Hindustan against-----of the Indians.

**Q 3** Explain the following idiomatic phrases.

Mangu was already in seventh heaven.

**Q 4** Give the meanings of the following word.

*Anarkali*

**Q 5** Explain the underlined expressions.

I cannot stand the sight of them, these human monkeys.

**Q 6** Write the summary of the short story.

### ARABY

(James Joyce)

**Name of the student.....**

**Answer the following questions.**

**Q 1** Why is the hero upset at the start of the story?

**Q 2** Fill in the blanks.

- (a) She could not go, she said, because there would be a-----that week in the convent.
- (b) My aunt was surprised and hoped it was not some----- affair.

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(c) ... who sang a *come-all-you*----- or a ballad about the troubles in our land.

(d) North Richmond Street was a quiet street at the hour when the Christian-----

Schools set the boys free.

**Q 3** Explain the following idiomatic phrases in simple words.

...we ran gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages to the back doors.....

**Q 4** Give the meanings of the following word.

*Araby*

**Q 5** Explain the underlined expression.

On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to carry some of the parcels.

**Q 6** Write the summary of the short story.

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