



A Conceptual Home for Reading Stories in Arabic, Chinese, and English: A Schema Analysis

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Abstract

This case study elucidates culture-based narrative texts based on the interpretation of Arabic, Chinese, and English native speakers. A maximum variation technique of purposeful sampling was used to capture the experience of the participants. The study employed a collective case study and adopted schema analysis, analyzing metaphors and interviewing participants. The study explored metaphors, including probing time, elaboration, content recall, and distortion generated by the participants while reading English text-based in a foreign context. The results revealed that culturally familiar texts stimulated readers' cultural schemata and enhanced their reading interpretation. The distortion and confusion that occurred while reading the unfamiliar texts could hamper readers' curiosity to instigate and build new cultural schemata. Furthermore, there was a reciprocal interweaving between cultural schema and linguistic competence, regardless of the nature of the cultural text and its familiarity or unfamiliarity. The study recommends further investigation about using English for cultural purposes.

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1. Introduction

The schematic inner workings of the mind have been a great concern for educators, psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and reading theorists (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Bartlett, 1932; Immanuel Kant, 1929; McVee et al., 2013; Rumelhart, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, Immanuel Kant (1929) believed that new information, concepts, and ideas could have meaning only when woven as referents to something the individual already knew. Language is considered the most sophisticated mediational tool of our society, culture, and world perception (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, Bartlett (1932) proposed that the text's organization and the reader's experience directly influence comprehension and retention of the textual material by arguing that in reading a story, a person might use the material in passage schemata embodying his background as a framework for understanding the events, setting, characters, and mood of the story. Logically, readers with different schemata would have different interpretations of a story.

The schema theory postulates how knowledge is represented and how embodied knowledge affects ability in different situations. The theory entails that human learning experiences occur upon interaction with external texts embedded in contextualized materials that serve in psychological construction and understanding. Cognition can be enhanced through familiarity with texts and accumulating similar experiences. The central function of schemata is to interpret an event, object, or situation in the process of comprehension (Kant, 1929; Piaget, 1936, 1952, 1970; Rumelhart, 1980; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977).

Schema theorists have well documented the effect of schema on text comprehension in processing and recalling information (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; McVee et al., 2013; Rumelhart, 1978, 1980, 2013). According to those theorists, knowledge is stored in schematic structures, or schemata, organized representations of one's background experiences that serve as basic "building blocks" of cognitive understanding (Rumelhart, 1980). The readers' cultural underpinnings influence their schemata. Schemata provide an interpretative framework that a reader could use when reading. In this regard, readers interpret cultural texts through their manifested sociocultural perspectives.

They use their background knowledge, cultural cues, situational context, and the cues provided by an author to construct an interpretation of the meaning of the text (Al-Issa, 2006; Blue, 2012; Ismail et al., 2018). Therefore, a text dealing with a culturally familiar topic will be easier to comprehend than a culturally unfamiliar one. However, what about using English as a medium of interpretation when dealing with different culturally-based texts (Arabic, Chinese, and English), which is the focus of the current study.

2. Theoretical Framework

Many scholars (Anderson, 2013; Carrell, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Collins et al., 1977; Rumelhart, 1980a; Spiro, 1980; Spiro et al., 1980) introduced the cultural schema principles and readers' cultural orientation in relation to interpretation while reading the cultural texts. Rumelhart (1980b) postulated schema theory explains how readers comprehend and learn a new culture-based text by retrieving their prior knowledge. Anderson (2013) stressed that schema theory underlines more than one interpretation for any reading text, depending on individuals' cultural and linguistic schema. Notably, understanding a text involves aggregating the meaning of words that constitute the sentences and the entirety of the text as it appears when the reader's schema that assists in clarifying and interpreting it is triggered and developed (Anderson, 2013). This triggering and development show the fundamental nature of the reading skill and is defined by Anderson (1999) as a process that is active and fluent wherein "synergy occurs in reading, which combines the words on the printed page with the reader's background knowledge and experiences" (p. 1).

Culture-based texts are never neutral. Such texts are embedded in constitutive language contexts, communities' discourses, culture, history, and traditions. Indeed, cultural familiarity plays an essential role in interpreting and understanding any reading text as a part of readers' cultural schema and linguistic competence. Different researchers (Anderson, 1978; Anderson et al., 1977; Bartlett, 1932; Carrell, 1981, 1987; Ebe, 2012; Sabatin, 2013; Sharifian, 2003; Shin et al., 2011; Yang, 2010; Yousef et al., 2014; Yuet & Chan, 2003) attempted to understand the relationship between culture and language, particularly in reading, and the role of cultural schema in interpretation. For instance,

Anderson et al. (1977) found that compared to reading foreign-language texts, individuals could read a native-language text more rapidly, recall more significant amounts of information from it, and produce more culture-appropriate elaborations; meanwhile, culture-based distortions were more when reading a foreign-language text. These results concluded that cultural schema has a pervasive influence on reading interpretation. The organized construction of cultural schemata serves to embody knowledge of the content of a text discourse. Ebe (2012) and Yuet and Chan (2003) added that readers' proficiency and comprehension are further enhanced while reading culture-relevant stories, which were well selected to support the reading development of English learners. This was supported by Shin et al. (2011), who confirmed that cultural presentation in textbooks should engage learners in deep levels of reflection. Carrell (1981, 1987), Sabatin (2013), Yang (2010), and Yousef et al. (2014) emphasized that language competence entwined with cultural schema benefits reading interpretation and comprehension. For instance, Carrell (1981) studied cultural schema by addressing the students' reading texts from different cultural backgrounds. Two groups of students, Chinese and Japanese, were given translated stories from Chinese, Japanese, French, American, and Indian folktales. After rewriting the reports, results showed low comprehension of the processed texts as the story schemata differed from the participant's culture. In a different context, Yousef et al. (2014) focused on the degree of familiarity of the reading text by examining the association between using culture-related texts and reading comprehension with Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Participants read three different texts: one culturally familiar topic and the other two addressing unfamiliar topics. Students performed better in the familiar text than they did in the unfamiliar texts. In another similar context, Yang (2010) examined how first language reading is similar or dissimilar to reading in a second language and cultural schema differences. Yang (2010) also emphasized the role of schema in understanding texts and how different schemata generally affect reading interpretation. He concluded that "when people's schema is connected to the specific language environment they are living in or familiar with, the common language and context will help them communicate smoothly"

(p. 180). Sabatin (2013) supported the ideas generated by Yang's (2010) study and concluded that there are two types of prior knowledge when introducing new information, namely, subject and cultural understanding, which serve as critical components for using language in a meaningful way.

What is found by Carrell (1981), Sabatin (2013), and Yang (2010) reflected the notion of emotioncy, which is a combination between emotion and frequency. This concept was coined by Pishghadam et al. (2013) and is defined as sense-induced emotions that serve in relativizing cognition because senses connect individuals to the outside meaningfully. The emotioncy notion shows that "individuals can construct their idiosyncratic understanding of the world through their senses" (Pishghadam et al., 2016, p. 14). For example, being familiar with the cultural aspects of a language indicates that an individual has heard, seen, or read cultural-based texts in this language, in which he/she becomes a more sense-meaning maker through experience (Pishghadam, 2015). Therefore, "the frequency of sensory experience awakens and moves emotioncy to evoke emotions through the senses, which can relativize cognition [such as the cultural schema of the target language]" (Miri & Pishghadam, 2021, p. 1). Familiarity can be related to the ways language learners experience their surrounding world, and the emotions they feel can be manifested and expressed by language. When learners add more senses to something, they increase the level of emotioncy, thus moving from evolvment to involvement (Pishghadam, 2015; Pishghadam et al., 2016; Pishghadam et al., 2019). In this regard, some language learners can be avolved (no knowledge), exvolved (just heard or seen), involved (direct experience), or even metavolved (produced or made something with respect to the culture. Learning will be facilitated as more senses are integrated with an experience (Miri & Pishghadam, 2021).

From different perspectives (Engin & Seven, 2005; Li & Lai, 2012; Patterson, 2012; Singhal, 1997), part of understanding the cultural schema should concern learners' views and attitudes toward information processing and culture-relevant texts when emotionally experiencing such of these texts while practicing

their reading skills. As Mashudi et al. (2022), Peterson (2004), and Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010) alluded, culture includes the everyday experiences of individuals' lives along with their feelings, attitudes, beliefs, ideas, viewpoints, body gestures, and tastes, postures, languages, and styles. Therefore, considering learners' views and attitudes facilitates understanding of how reading skills are developed, the prerequisite cultural materials and experiences language learners need to create a supportive and motivating learning environment, and the nature of the cultural schema built by learners. Li and Lai (2012) expressed the critical role readers' background knowledge plays, referring to reading as an interactive progression that includes the reader and the text. Moreover, most Taiwanese students asserted the importance of their prior knowledge and cultural experiences that they sense when reading texts. Furthermore, Patterson (2012) confirmed that ninth-grade African American students were enthusiastic and highly engaged with culturally relevant texts. However, the Arab participants in Singhal's study (1997) demonstrated that the content of the text and the language and textual schemata assist the understanding of a text.

Sometimes language learners have limited knowledge regarding culturally comprehending and interpreting a reading text using English due to the lack of experience. They tend to focus only on the academic aspects of language learning rather than acquiring the pragmatic aspects. Learning leaves little room for language learners to understand the context when placed in everyday situations that present opportunities to use and sense language skills (Brown, 2000). Notably, language learning is meaningfully entwined with the culture of the language. Readers from distinct national cultures interpret culturally sensitive materials differently (Steffensen et al., 1979). Language learners' obstacles are primarily relevant to the lack of familiarity with selected topics, especially cultural ones, because of cultural background or linguistic competence (Carrell, 1987; Sabatin, 2013; Yang, 2010). Learners are prone to misunderstand or incorrectly interpret situations due to scant knowledge about the culture in which the reading text is embedded. The absence of cultural familiarity with topics leads to insufficient ability to interpret and comprehend a culture-based text, particularly

narrative texts. Therefore, intensive exposure to cultural contexts and materials is paramount to promoting reading skills effectively (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000). For example, EFL learners implement accessible patterns to understand what they read using their constructed cultural schema (Sharma, 2015). Therefore, EFL students face reading, comprehension, and interpretation difficulties when they cannot connect it with the cultural or existing schema they have already experienced and built. For example, Arabs as EFL learners achieved low performance in reading skills tests on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) proficiency exam. Students from most Arabic countries had band scores of 4–5 in reading. Based on IELTS specifications, band scores 4 and 5 represent limited language users with basic competence only in familiar cultural situations (British Council, 2018, IELTS, 2019). Nonetheless, Chinese students scored between 5.5–and 6 in IELTS reading skills, representing moderate competency in language use despite inaccuracies, inappropriate usage, and misunderstanding in some situations (British Council, 2018, IELTS, 2019). However, these Chinese students had band scores of 5 or below in the other skills (speaking, writing, and listening). Such results do not reflect their cultural familiarity with the reading test but affect their technical and systemic learning style (British Council, 2018, IELTS, 2019). This notion was supported by Shao's study (2014), which found that the lack of cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries causes reading anxiety in Chinese students and decreases their learning efficiency in English reading. Indeed, many studies highlight the role of readers' cultural background in reading comprehension of their first and second language (Bernhardt, 2005; Carrell & Wise, 1998; Chang, 2006; Gaffney & Anderson, 2000; Gürkan, 2012; Hudson, 1982; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Liu, 2015; Pulido, 2007; Rawson & Kintsch, 2004; Sabatin, 2013; Taylor, 1979; Yousef et al., 2014). These studies elucidate the reader's background knowledge to gain a social and cultural understanding of familiar and unfamiliar texts. However, none of these studies emphasizes the role of using English to communicate culturally familiar/unfamiliar text and how this contradicts readers' existing cultural schema, particularly within a context where three different cultures were addressed (Arabic, Chinese, and English). Hence, in this study, an understanding of the

role of cultural schema in nurturing reading interpretation was considered. English as a medium of interpretation could influence the readers' interpretation and communication of their ideas. Six participants from different cultural backgrounds offered their opinions about using culture-based narrative texts to assist their reading interpretation using English for reading, interpreting, and communicating ideas. Based on that, this study focused on one central question and two corollary questions:

1. How do college students from different cultures interpret culture-based narrative texts using English as a medium for interpretation?
 - a) How do native Arabic, Chinese, and English speakers respond to culture-based narrative texts using English as a medium for interpretation?
 - b) How do Arabic, Chinese, and English native speakers view their reading of different culture-based narrative texts?

3. Methodology

This study employed a collective case study design, which involved analyzing college students who are Arabic, Chinese, and English native speakers. The study used a holistic analysis of the case study examined by Yin (2018). This study evaluates the role of cultural schema and linguistic competence in supporting native readers of Arabic, Chinese, and English when interpreting familiar and unfamiliar

culture-based narrative texts using English. It also probed the participants' views toward using culture-based narrative texts in English as a medium for communication.

3.1. Participants and Settings

Six participants were selected, satisfying the primary criteria for participant selection: their availability and willingness to participate in this study (Gay et al., 2011; Bryman, 2012). A maximum variation sampling technique was employed within the purposive selection of the sample by which the researchers maximized differences among participants of the study to increase the likelihood that the findings would reflect different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, two participants were English native speakers, two were Arabic native speakers, and two were Chinese native speakers. As a case study, the selection of the participants was bound and described within specific criteria (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, for this case study, participants' learning experiences were the main criteria, considering that they were college (undergraduate) students from different majors, used English as a communication medium, and belonged to different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, they all studied in a foreign country (United Arab Emirates), where Arab students were considered EFL learners, Chinese students were regarded as second language learners, and English students were native speakers. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1
Students' Demographic Information (N = 6)

| Participants | Age | Gender | Nationality | Major |
|--------------|-----|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Paul | 22 | Male | English | Physics |
| Mary | 25 | Female | English | IT |
| Xiao | 20 | Male | Chinese | Engineering |
| Sofia | 21 | Female | Chinese | Education |
| Fatimah | 20 | Female | Emirati | Education |
| Tariq | 21 | Male | Jordanian | Sociology |

3.2. Instruments

This study used two major instruments: written document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Their functions were sequenced as each allowed for interpretive data collection. Regarding the written documents, three culture-based narrative texts were used in this study; these were: the English story, *A Birthday Remember* by Elizabeth Leopard (2000), the

Chinese story, *Chinese First Birthday Marks Cultural Rite of Passage* by Zhantao Yang (2008), and the Arabic story, *The Dead Afternoon* by Walid Ikhlāṣī (1967) (See Appendix A). Each story was written and presented to the participants in English. Four main tasks were assigned to the participants after reading the narrative texts. The first task was to create a new title for the given stories. The second task was to retell the entire story. The third task was

to elaborate on the intended meaning of the shared stories. The fourth task was to extract moral values (see Appendix B). While the participants were reading, the time spent processing the narrative texts was calculated along with other measurement criteria. The measurement criteria used to assess the participants' processing of the narrative texts were *time*, *gist recall*, and *elaboration and distortion* (See Appendix C), adapted from Steffensen et al. (1979). Accordingly, the distribution of the narrative texts among the six participants was as follows: English college students were asked to read the English and Chinese stories, Chinese college students were asked to read the Chinese and Arabic stories, and Arabic college students were asked to read the Arabic and Chinese stories.

Semi-structured interviews were used to understand the participants' views toward the culture-based narrative texts and their feeling upon reading such texts. Kvale's (2007) seven stages were adopted in planning the interview study; according, the interview went as follows: 1) Thematising the interview study; 2) Designing and structuring the interview by its purpose; 3) Conducting the interview, as at this point, participants should know about the purpose of this study; 4) Transcribing interview responses for analysis; 5) Analysis through the integration of the purpose of this study; 6) Verifying and asserting the validity of the knowledge generated from these interviews, and 7) Reporting and communicating the main findings derived from the interviews being conducted. Each of the six participants was individually interviewed for 30 minutes. During the interview, the researchers carefully listened to the participants. They asked follow-up questions for further elaboration based on questions that offered in-depth insight and accurate data from participants' responses, which was so-called "communicative validity" by Kvale (2007). Communicative validity was a continuous process of verification by asking participants to verify the meaning of their responses during the interview (Kvale, 2007). Peer validation was also established when different transcribers and analyzers had similar transcriptions and analyses (Kvale, 2007).

3.3. Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis begins with the occurrence of the initial contact with

the participants and continues throughout the implementation of the study (Gay et al., 2011). The researchers adopted the schema analysis approach by analyzing metaphors and interviewing methods (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The analyzing metaphors method represented the participants' ways of thinking and experiencing the reading of culture-based narrative texts. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) revealed that analyzing metaphors relates to studying everyday discourse in which "what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (p. 3). Therefore, part of the participants' role was to interpret and elaborate on the meaning of some metaphors stated in the culture-based narrative texts toward collecting and analyzing the written document. Along with the schema analysis, the linguistic competence of the participants was analyzed, adopting the analytical strategy suggested by Coffey (2014). This kind of analysis allowed the researchers to analyze the written documents as a process and product by examining the production process, linguistic features, and, ultimately, the targeted content. The process in this document analysis represented the culture-based narrative texts where some reading tasks should be processed. The content and linguistic feature analysis were based on the main criteria for gauging the reading process. Researchers tallied the number of gist recalls, elaborations, and distortions in each task to quantify the qualitative data while processing the assigned narrative texts (see Appendix D). This enabled researchers to make comparisons between familiar and unfamiliar culture-based narrative texts.

The analysis of participants' written responses followed four phases: training, rating, discussion, and decision. Phase One was training. Three native speakers from United Arab Emirates, China, and the United Kingdom (as cultural experts) were asked to clarify the implicit and explicit meaning in the texts. These cultural experts worked in the social sciences and had rich knowledge about anthropology, sociology, and their home countries' cultures. They acted as informants mediating between the researchers and the participants, whose cultural background knowledge they conveyed to the researchers (Lavrakas, 2008; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Creswell, 2013). These cultural experts in the study had a pivotal role in providing cultural knowledge to the rater and

acting as the sources of advice and guidance about the conflicting opinions of the researchers. After the cultural experts' explanation, researchers retold and answered the questions based on the texts until each researcher had a strong understanding of the texts. This training lasted for four hours.

Phase Two involved rating. When the participants completed the tasks, three raters (researchers) independently classified participants' written

responses to texts into gist recall, elaboration, and distortion categories. The texts were coded by idea units, and the three categories had different coding values: Gist recall = 1, Elaboration = 2, and Distortion = 3. The internal consistency among the raters was calculated with a Cronbach's alpha value of .93. Inter-rater reliability was established by developing an inter-item correlation matrix in SPSS (version 25), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

| | Rater 1 | Rater 2 | Rater 3 | Rater 4 | Rater 5 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Rater 1 | 1.000 | .868 | .713 | .636 | 1.000 |
| Rater 2 | .868 | 1.000 | .618 | .767 | .868 |
| Rater 3 | .713 | .618 | 1.000 | .372 | .713 |
| Rater 4 | .636 | .767 | .372 | 1.000 | .636 |
| Rater 5 | 1.000 | .868 | .713 | .636 | 1.000 |

Phase Three was discussion. Raters read each participant's responses together. Similar rating results were considered valid results. Different rating results were discussed in terms of stating and explaining the justifications, and raters consulted the cultural experts about conflicting ideas before making further decisions. Phase

Four involved a decision. After discussion, raters eventually reached an agreement. Raters counted the amount of the gist recall, elaboration, and distortion from each participant's response text. The results are illustrated in tables. The four phases are depicted in Figure 1.

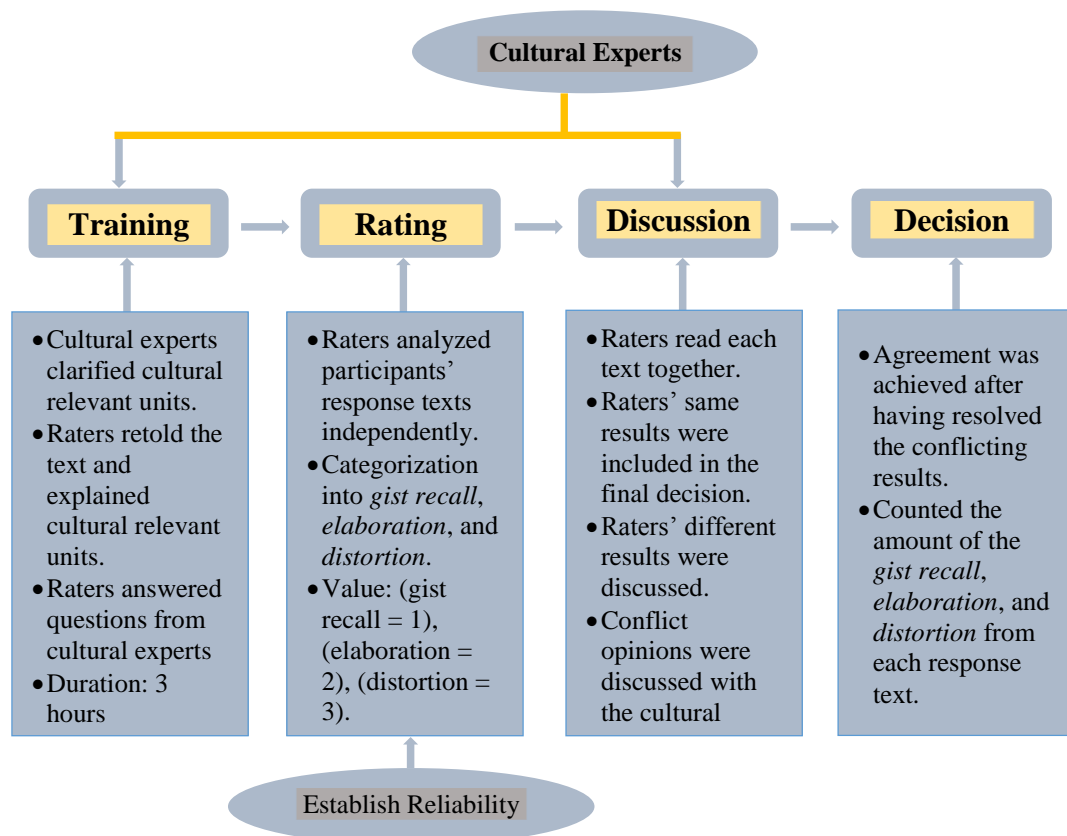


Figure 1

The Four Phases of Analysis

The interviewing method in the schema analysis demonstrated the participants' repetition of similar views, words, and expressions during the interview process to generate meaningful themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). This commonality among the participants also established the reliability and objectivity of the knowledge generated from the interview (Kvale, 2007). In analyzing the interview, two modes of analysis were used; there were: 1) "meaning coding," used to code,

de-contextualize, and categorize participants' responses (Kvale, 2007), and 2) "meaning condensation," used to analyze the interviews in which the researchers tried to compress the meanings expressed by the participants into meaningful themes then tied these themes together within cases (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, four pieces were extracted. The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 2, showing the nature of the schema analysis.

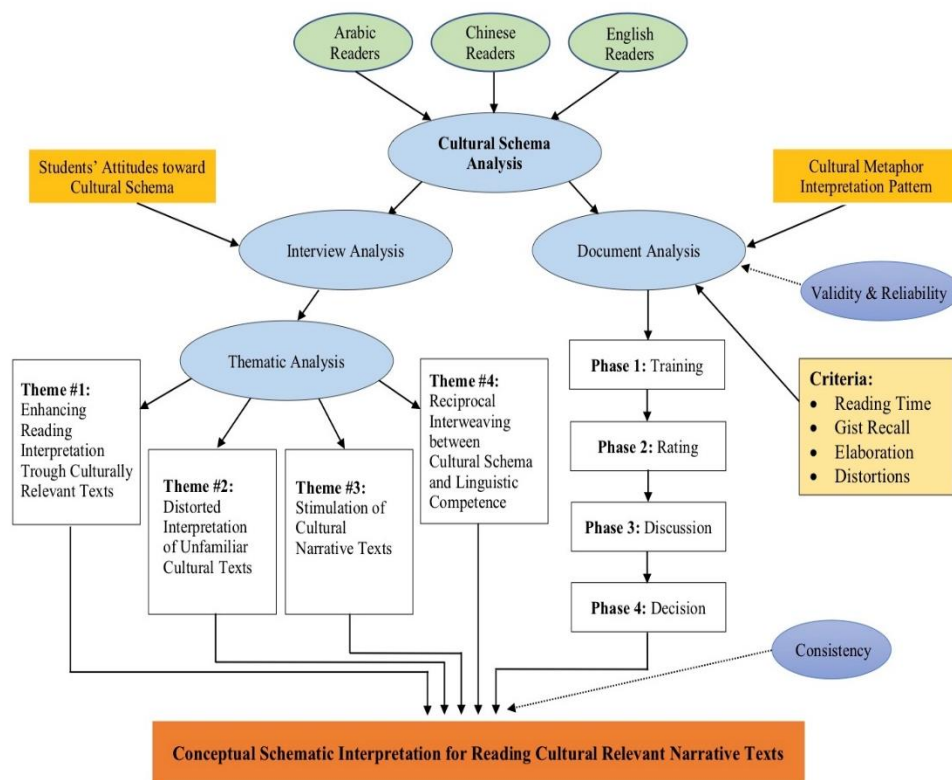


Figure 2

Conceptual Model of Cultural Schema Interpretation Analysis

4. Results

The first sub-research question asked how native speakers of Arabic, Chinese, and English readers respond to culture-based narrative texts using English as a medium for interpretation. Results in Table 3 indicate a noticeable difference between participants' processing of a familiar narrative text (English story) and the processing of an unfamiliar narrative text (Chinese story). As per individual cases, native English speakers (Paul and Mary) spent less time reading English stories than reading Chinese culture-based stories. Higher frequency

was found in gist recall and elaboration when processing English narrative text compared with Chinese narrative text. Distortion was found to be significantly higher in Chinese narrative text compared with English narrative text. However, what was remarkable in Mary's case was her elaboration on the Chinese story compared with the English story, as reflected by her writing volume. To illustrate further, she wrote two more lines to elaborate on essential ideas from the English story. Still, she exerted considerable effort to write around five lines when reading the Chinese story (See Table 3).

Table 3*English Native Speakers' Interpretations of English vs. Chinese Narrative Texts*

| Measurement Criteria | English Native Speakers | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Paul | | Mary | |
| | English Story | Chinese Story | English Story | Chinese Story |
| Time (minutes) | 7:26 | 25:54 | 5:05 | 19:44 |
| Gist Recall | 5 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Elaborations | 14 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Distortions | 0 | 6 | 0 | 4 |

For individual cases, Chinese native speakers (Sofia and Xiao) needed almost double the amount of time to process the Arabic story compared with their reading of the Chinese story. Gist recall and elaboration were observed when processing Chinese narrative text. For the Arabic narrative text, gist recall and elaboration

were not found. Consequently, the distortion in Arabic narrative text was recurrent. Table 4 shows a clear difference between participants' processing of a familiar narrative text (Chinese story) and their processing of an unfamiliar narrative text (Arabic story).

Table 4*Chinese Native Speakers' Interpretations of Chinese vs. Arabic Narrative Texts*

| Measurement Criteria | Chinese Native Speakers | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Sofia | | Xiao | |
| | Chinese Story | Arabic Story | Chinese Story | Arabic Story |
| Time (minutes) | 11:49 | 23:25 | 14:55 | 28:34 |
| Gist Recall | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Elaborations | 13 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Distortions | 0 | 6 | 0 | 11 |

Table 5 compares the difference between participants' processing of a familiar narrative text (Arabic story) and the processing of an unfamiliar narrative text (Chinese story). For individual cases, the Arabic native speakers (Fatimah and Tariq) used less processing when reading the Arabic culture-based story than when reading the Chinese story. Higher frequency was found in gist recall and elaboration when processing Arabic narrative text compared with Chinese culture-based

narrative text. Distortion was found in Chinese narrative text more frequently than in Arabic. However, Tariq's case is remarkable because his elaboration in the Chinese story was similar to that performed in the Arabic story. This was shown in the volume of his writing due to his high competency in English, as he used that as a medium of communication to represent his interpretations of Arabic and Chinese narrative texts. The comparison of Tariq and Fatimah's cases is provided in Table 5.

Table 5*Arabic Native Speakers' Interpretations of Arabic vs. Chinese Narrative Texts*

| Measurement Criteria | Arabic Native Speakers | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| | Fatimah | | Tariq | |
| | Arabic Story | Chinese Story | Arabic Story | Chinese Story |
| Time (minutes) | 11:47 | 32:19 | 10:05 | 28:26 |
| Gist Recall | 3 | 1 | 9 | 3 |
| Elaborations | 7 | 3 | 8 | 6 |
| Distortions | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 |

The second sub-research question concerns how Arabic, Chinese, and English native speakers view different culture-based narrative texts. Based on the analysis of the participants'

responses in the interviews, four major themes were extracted: 1) enhancing reading interpretation through culture-relevant texts, 2) distorted interpretation of unfamiliar cultural

texts, 3) stimulation of cultural narrative texts and 4) reciprocal interweaving between cultural schema and linguistic competence.

4.1. Enhancing Reading Interpretation through Culture-Relevant Texts

Having a cultural background drastically facilitated comprehension and interpretation of narrative texts. The participants confirmed that using a familiar culture-based reader contributed to recalling and elaborating the stories' events, metaphors, and expressions in a meaningful way, even though the participants used English as a medium to communicate their interpretations. Paul's response reflected this: "This story reminds me of the historical hardship of the 1930s. This helped me understand the intended message of the story's necessity for kindness and compassion." Additionally, using culture-based narrative texts piqued the participants' curiosity to understand and predict more than one interpretation as they were using English when reading the stories; Tariq expressed that:

The Arabic story might be somehow mysterious, especially when the character says to himself: "You won't hear the story of the singing nightingale anymore," this mystery evokes my curiosity to understand what she meant sincerely. Maybe the grandmother had a severe illness!!

4.2. Distorted Interpretation of Unfamiliar Cultural Texts

The participants produced distorted interpretations while reading the culturally unfamiliar narrative texts. The participants expressed the difficulty they encountered in understanding and interpreting stories that were culturally irrelevant to their cultural schema. Hence, they could not maximize and elaborate on the texts' characters, metaphors, and expressions. They interpreted ideas that violated the general intended meaning of the texts. This appeared in Sofia's response:

I faced difficulty in understanding the Arabic story. I was confused. I did not know who "Suzanne" was or the relationship between the level and the fly. I did not get any points from the story because I felt that I did not have any background about the ideas presented in the story.

Some of them interpreted the unfamiliar text based on the sociocultural perspectives of their cultures, which led to losing the essence of the metaphor or the embedded meaning described in the story. Mary expressed:

I don't know if I'm right or not. The Chinese story was interesting in that it talked about Chinese traditions. These traditions were based on superstitions, just as horoscopes in the West were often used to predict a person's character and suitability for a particular career.

4.3. Stimulation of Culture-Based Narrative Texts

Exposure to the culture-based narrative texts, whether familiar or unfamiliar, was the utmost preference for all the participants. The actual gain from this exposure was to construct new cultural schemata. The old experiences triggered and stimulated their cultural schema, enabling them to think deeply and bring forth different perspectives to interpret narrative texts. Xiao reflected this: "Actually reading this culturally Arabic story will help me later to understand other stories written by Arab authors, although I faced a lot of difficulties to process the intended message wanted to be transferred by the narrator." Fatimah considered it an advantage concerning the context of where she lived. She saw that being exposed to different stories from different cultures would help her understand other cultures in her community. She reflected on the importance of establishing cultural knowledge and tried to use it in her real-life communication.

We are exposed to different cultures' narratives by reading stories since I live in a multicultural context. We need as language learners to construct additional cultural knowledge. This will help develop our reading comprehension when we process different cultural narratives. (Fatimah, interview response)

4.4. Reciprocal Interweaving Between Cultural Schema and Linguistic Competence

The reading process involves cultural schema to interpret and understand the narratives and the vital role of the linguistic schema. Interestingly, one of the Arab learners faced difficulty understanding the Arabic narrative story. Although it was culturally relevant, it was translated into English. As described by Tariq:

It was challenging to understand the Arabic narrative because it was written in English, and I didn't have enough English vocabulary to understand every detail in the narrative. However, the cultural background assisted in understanding the general ideas generated from the narrative text.

Moreover, one of the Chinese learners faced difficulty elaborating his ideas using English, so he selected Arabic as a medium for communicating his ideas (See Appendix E). He found himself comfortable and more meaningful in his interpretations when he used the language of the culture itself, Arabic, as he reflected in the interview:

Frankly speaking, I preferred to write in Arabic instead of English because I thought it would be more expressive and help me elaborate more ideas from the Arabic narrative text. My Arabic is excellent, and I can use it to communicate my thoughts meaningfully.

5. Discussion

In this study, we sought to understand the role of cultural schema and linguistic competence in supporting native readers of Arabic, Chinese, and English to interpret familiar and unfamiliar culture-based narrative texts with English as a communication medium. The study also tried to capture the participants' views on using these narrative texts written in English. The results identified one significant finding: the evident difference between participants' processing of culturally familiar and unfamiliar narrative texts. This reflects how vital, culturally relevant materials could be in whetting readers' comprehension and interpretation abilities through instigating and constructing cultural schemata for language learners. This finding, despite being by those reported in similar studies (Anderson et al., 1978; Bartlett, 1932; Carrell, 1981, 1987; Ebe, 2012; Sabatin, 2013; Sharifian, 2003; Shin et al., 2011; Steffensen et al., 1979; Winfield & Barnes-Felfeli, 1982; Yang, 2010; Yousef et al., 2014; Yuet & Chan, 2003), provided a more detailed account of the crucial role of language schema along with the cultural schema in interpreting and understanding culture-based reading texts. Learners with a well-constructed cultural schema with limited linguistic competence will not be able to comprehend and interpret the text, even if the texts are culturally relevant. As supported by

Miri and Pishghadam (2021), familiarity can be related to the ways learners experience their surrounding world (e.g., target language and culture), and the emotions they feel can be communicated and manifested in language. This indicates the interweaving and reciprocal relationship between linguistic competence and the cultural schema in reading interpretation. Some participants faced difficulties understanding culture-based narrative texts from their own culture due to English as the medium to present the narrative texts. For example, Tariq, a native Arabic speaker, had almost the same number of frequent elaborations in Arabic and Chinese stories, which could be interpreted as struggling to interpret the text in both languages. Moreover, another Arabic native speaker, Fatimah, scored low in gist recall in the Arabic narrative text with high occurrence in elaboration. This showed a remarkable contradiction between elaboration and gist recall, which meant that Fatimah still did not understand the essence of the Arabic narrative text. However, she used her culture-based Arabic schema to elaborate on ideas found in the Arabic story. This result corroborated what Sabatin (2013) found, who emphasized that language learners needed the following two types of prior knowledge to build new schemata while reading—cultural and linguistic knowledge.

In this case study, the participants expressed a positive view of using familiar and unfamiliar culture-based narrative texts. Using culture-based narrative texts was a supportive part of constructing schemata for the participants while reading, mainly from different cultural backgrounds. This result corroborated findings by Engin and Seven (2005), Li and Lai (2012), Patterson (2012), and Singhal (1997), who found that English language learners stressed the importance of having cultural experiences that make them more engrossed when reading different cultural relevant texts. Additionally, we must emphasize the importance of language learners' exposure to different cultural materials, whether familiar or unfamiliar. Culturally responsive learning and multicultural literature will make English learners more amenable to different worldviews. For example, when the participants read unfamiliar narrative texts, they were confused and tried to use their cultural schema to interpret foreign narrative texts from their sociocultural context. For

example, a native Chinese learner, Sofia, said, "I faced difficulty understanding the Arabic story in this study. I was confused." She found the Chinese narrative text easy and enjoyable to read, stating, "I found using a story talking about my culture... was something interesting." However, this confusion triggered the participants' curiosity to learn more about other cultures. As Fatima reflected, "Exposing to different narratives from different cultures by reading stories is something worthwhile, since I'm living in a multicultural context. As language learners, we need to construct different cultural knowledge." This finding contradicted the findings revealed by Engin and Seven (2005) and Patterson (2012) when their participants preferred using culturally relevant texts that talked only about their cultures.

Based on the findings, non-native English participants faced some linguistic challenges and difficulties. English was the language through which they communicated their ideas and mediated cultural concepts about their cultures and other cultures while reading. They all spent more time processing and interpreting the culture-based narrative texts, whether familiar or unfamiliar. For example, one of the native Chinese learners used Arabic to complete the reading tasks instead of English because he found it easy to use Arabic in expressing his ideas and interpreting the text metaphors. His level of emotioncy is increasing because he is involved in the Arabic culture (Pishghadam, 2015; Pishghadam et al., 2016; Pishghadam et al., 2019). Furthermore, some learners used an online dictionary to translate some English words into their native language to understand the narrative texts. For instance, Tariq showed his negative attitude toward the use of the English language in his Arabic narrative text when he said, "Actually, it was difficult to understand the Arabic narrative because it was written in English and I don't have English vocabulary enough to understand every single detail." However, the cultural schema helped Tariq elaborate more in his Arabic narrative texts. As Carrell (1987), Yang (2010), and Sabatin (2013) postulated, linguistic competence entwined with cultural schema benefited reading interpretation and comprehension.

Generally, the schema and cultural factors seem crucial for interpreting the reading materials.

Whether a schema exists beyond an individual's social and cultural communities, we must question the origins of schema. To answer this question, McVee et al. (2013) discussed the role of social and cultural factors. They questioned how to make sense of the education content for everyone and make learning a prosperous journey. Educational researchers and teachers should ask these questions. Practically, classroom teachers agreed on students' prior cultural knowledge in text comprehension and interpretation, but they expressed difficulties activating students' schema due to the lack of adequate training on schema theory (Carrell, 1984; Alhaisoni, 2017). Hence, understanding the role of cultural schema is necessary for teachers' education and curriculum development. For example, they need to know how to be aware of the individual's differentiation in terms of their cultural and social backgrounds when selecting and designing curricula. Additionally, teachers need to know how to trigger, activate, and use students' schemata to facilitate their reading cognition development in the language. Therefore, longitudinal multiphase mixed-method design should be considered to determine different realities about cultural schema construction and the construction of linguistic competence. Moreover, it is essential to consider the English language and how it affects the readers' interpretation of cultural topics. There is a need for more investigation on using English for cultural purposes as an extended field related to the language used for any specific purpose.

Although significant findings are found in this study, some limitations resulting from the methodological conduction of the study must be considered. First, due to the time limitation, this study was conducted on a small sample size, based on availability and willingness to participate. Therefore, generalizing the results to a larger-sized population or other contexts should be avoided. Second, a certain degree of subjectivity can be found in the study regarding interviewing and document analysis. However, researchers tried to limit subjectivity by applying inter-rater objectivity. Generally, small size and subjectivity are expected in qualitative research; however, those can be viewed as limitations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

English, Arabic, and Chinese Narrative Texts

Chinese First Birthday Marks Cultural Rite of Passage

• BY ZHANTAO YANG
July 22, 2008

For most Westerners, coming of age brings to mind quinceneras, sweet sixteen and bar mitzvahs. But in China, it is different.

The coming of age ceremonies here are held before a child has learned to take a single step.

In Beijing, Zhang Yong Qiang let ABC News watch as he and his family prepared for his daughter Yuan Chi's coming-out party, known here as "the first grab." It will be one the most important milestones of her young life.

"There is a saying that the beginning is never easy," explains Zhang about his daughter. "If our little treasure is able to make it to a year old, she has passed one of the hardest hurdles of her life."

For centuries, a Chinese baby's first year was passed with bated breath. China's high infant mortality rate meant that if a baby made it to its first birthday, it was much more likely to survive. Therefore, this milestone is much more important than any other birthday, and the most appropriate time for celebration and the "zhua zhou" or the birthday grab.

Two Birth Dates

By the strictest of standards, Little Yuan Chi's official birthday isn't for another couple of weeks. However, like many traditional Chinese families, Yuan Chi's family decided to celebrate her birthday according to the lunar calendar.

Most Chinese use two calendars. The "yang li" or Western calendar is used officially in everything from newspapers to government ordinances. Holidays in China, such as the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival and New Year's, are still celebrated according to the "ying li" or lunar calendar. Since the lunar calendar doesn't always match up to the solar calendar days, Chinese people can choose which birthday to celebrate.

A Birthday Remembered



A good way to repay a kindness shown is to pass it on.
Martha Kinney

As a child growing up in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri in the 1930s, I didn't know we were poor—in fact, at the age of four, I really didn't know what poor was.

But I did know I was getting tired of eating oatmeal and being cold.

One day we heard a sharp, loud knock at the door. I clung to my mother's skirt as she opened the door to what appeared to be a giant in overalls. His face was weatherworn, and his hair was long and poorly cut. His eyes were sharp and piercing.

"You Leonard Presson's woman?" It was more a demand for information than a question.

"Yes," Mother's voice was shallow and frightened. "But he's off hunting."

The giant turned and waved to two boys in a wagon pulled close to the door. "Well, we know y'all didn't get home from out West soon enough to put in a crop, so we brung you food to tide you over."

While he talked, the boys unloaded sacks of flour, grain, sugar, canned food of several varieties and smoked meat. Mother picked me up and stood against the wall. "We can't pay . . ." she began.

"You been gone a long time, Mrs. Eva." His stern face softened. "These is bad times—people comin' home 'cause they lost everything in the crash." He waved the boys back to the now-empty wagon. "Be sure you're in church come Sunday." He swung into the wagon and picked up the reins. "You'll be helpin' feed others next winter." Something resembling a smile split his somber face. "We hill people take care of our own."

That night we feasted, and on Sunday we were in church. My parents were greeted warmly by people I was yet to know.

Winter passed, and in the spring the hills and valleys that made up my world came alive with the promise of new life. Crops were planted and carefully tended. All summer

The Dead Afternoon

The wall-clock struck five, filling the house with its ringing. I was watching the swallows from my window as they crossed the city sky; thousands of swallows, black moving specks.

The evening, meanwhile, prepared to occupy its place in a new day.

'May they find favour with God,' I said to my grandmother, who had finished her prayers.

'I was late performing the afternoon prayer,' she answered sadly.

'Never mind, there will be other afternoons.'

My grandmother did not hear me.

I looked at an enormous fly squatting on the outside of the window-pane: it seemed to be defying me, sitting there so close to my nose.

'This fly has annoyed me all day,' I said, 'and I haven't been able to kill it.'

My grandmother did not reply: she had started on a new prayer.

I was not conscious of the passage of time: the fly had taken up so much of it. I had threatened it by tapping on the glass, but it had not stirred. Looking at my finger-nails and seeing that they were long, I produced a pair of scissors and began to pare them.

The sky was being engulfed in soft darkness, and the only sound to cut across my grandmother's voice as she recited her prayers, seated in her gazelle-skin chair, was the clock striking six.

My young sister came in from the other room.

'Today we'll be eating *kunāfa* with walnuts,' she announced.

'I don't like it.'

My sister laughed. 'This morning you said you wanted *kunāfa*.'

'I just don't like it.'

Turning again to the window, I was surprised to find that the fly

Appendix B

Tasks Done During Reading the Narrative Texts

Task 1: Understand the Main Ideas of the Story

Create your own title for the story

Task 2: Retell the whole Story Events

Task 3. Elaborate the Intended Meaning

What did the giant man mean when he said: "you'll be ~~helpin~~ feed others next winter."

Task 4. Extracting Moral values

Are there any moral lessons learnt from the story?

Task 5: State Your Opinion about the Stories

Appendix C

Criteria used to Gauge the Reading Process for the Narrative Texts

| Measurement Criteria | Participant Name: Paul | Nationality: English |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| | English Story | Chinese Story |
| Time | | |
| Gist Recall | | |
| Elaborations | | |
| Distortions | | |

| Measurement Criteria | Participant Name: Fatimah | Nationality: Emirati |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | English Story | Chinese Story |
| Time | | |
| Gist Recall | | |
| Elaborations | | |
| Distortions | | |

| Measurement Criteria | Participant Name: Xiao | | Nationality: Chinese | |
|----------------------|------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| | Chinese Story | | Arabic Story | |
| Time | | | | |
| Gist Recall | | | | |
| Elaborations | | | | |
| Distortions | | | | |

Appendix D

Quantifying the Qualitative Data

Q1
Understand the Main Ideas of the Story. Create your own title for the story.

G.R.
Paying it forward - this is a common expression used to express the idea that by showing kindness first encourages and helps others kind in turn to others.

Q2
Retell the whole Story Events

E
Mother and son (on son's 4th birthday) are waiting for the father to return from hunting. A neighbour calls by and offers them help by food as he knows the family are poor and hungry. He in turn expects the family to show thanks by sharing in the community values and attend church, and that they too will be helping others if circumstances were different - the family comply. The mother advises her son he will learn an important lesson in life on his 5th birthday. The son on his 5th birthday helps the community to distribute food to others in need. He is grateful for the opportunity to help others and feels satisfaction in doing good and helping others in distress.

Q3
Elaborate the Intended Meaning. What did the giant man mean when he said: "you'll be helpin' feed others next wir

The message implies hope that the families circumstances will improve for the better.

Q4
Extracting Moral values. Are there any moral values learnt from the story?

G.R.
Yes. Treat others as you would be treated and show kindness to all, especially those less fortunate than ourselves. Also that we should judge others as we may all walk the same path as part of the human endeavour to survive.

Q5
Your thoughts. Please state your opinion about the story.

The story is a historical commentary on the hardships of the 1930's economic depression in the USA written for school children with message of the necessity for kindness and compassion.

s/JVabeuAXm55FJA7LVBycKs1vyaEdhL_2BTU69yM9mWVl_3D7respondent_id=6739093861 Page 1 of 2

10/8 Elaboration
10/4 Gist Recall
10/2 Distortion.

Task 1: Understand the Main Ideas of the Story
Create your own title for the story

GR = 3

Task 2: Retell the whole Story Events

E = 7

Task 3: Elaborate the Intended Meaning
What did the character mean by saying: "I drew a veil of silence over the voice?"

D = X

Arabic Fatima

2. Retell the whole story events.

Q1 To China if a baby's first birthday passed with a celebration of age, it is called "first grab". It will be the most important step in her/his life and this birthday is much more important than another birthday.

Q2 We had two birth dates in our Chinese culture. The "yang li" and western calendar are used for celebrating it, and these two calendars are not match, therefore people could decide which day will go celebrate it.

Q3 "Long noodles" is the most important food on the celebration feast. It represents long life.

Q4 "egg" is also has different meaning that it means full life.

Q5 "Zhua zhai" is people placed many item in front of baby and different items represent different careers and life in the future. Babies could choose whatever they want.

Appendix E

The Use of Arabic by A Chinese Learner

Please answer the following questions:

1. Create your own title for the story.

حياة الأولاد بملاذهم بالصين

2. Retell the whole story events.

① ملاذ الأولاد يكون أمر مهم في حياة الشباب والفناليات
في يوم الميلاد كمثل يوم ذكرهم به ابنة البنت ،

② يعرفون أنهم فاعل يوم املاذهم مرة واحدة بنسبة
الهم جراً .

③ المذكرات بالصين طعام لايزد ومحبوب الناس
ال هناك يوم حيث أنواع المذكرات أهم طعام
لبعض الناس في يوم ميلادهم لأنه يعني حيث يأكل
هذا المذكرات ، فغيره يسطول في حياته ، بالضبط
هذا مثال فقط لأن هذا على فكرتهم حياتهم
سيرة ومجملات .