

Review of the doctoral dissertation

Ahmad S. Naji: *Narratives in response to visual stimuli: A comparative analysis of cultural schemas and implicit motives among Hungarian and Jordanian bilinguals in EFL context*

The dissertation investigates cross-cultural variations in narrative construction and motivational patterns among 230 Hungarian and Jordanian undergraduate students enrolled in English Studies, English Literature, or Linguistics programs at universities in Hungary and Jordan, within the framework of English as a Foreign Language. The research is organized into three separate studies, each combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine written narratives. The participants, with a mean age of 21 years (ranging from 18 to 25), were asked to compose narratives in response to different stimuli, including a silent film and Thematic Apperception Test picture cards. Using thematic analysis alongside the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software, the studies demonstrate how cultural contexts, through culturally embedded schemas, influence narrative expression and motivational orientations.

The first study included 130 participants (66 Hungarian and 64 Jordanian students), who were asked to compose narratives in English after viewing a silent film. This investigation highlights how cultural schemas profoundly influence second-language storytelling.

The second study investigates cross-cultural differences in narrative construction among Hungarian and Jordanian bilingual university students. A total of 100 participants (50 Hungarians and 50 Jordanians) were tasked with producing English narratives in response to four Thematic Apperception Test picture cards. This study aims to uncover how culturally ingrained schemas shape narrative strategies and thematic choices in a second-language context.

The third study examines the same 100 participants' narratives from study 2 through a quantitative analysis focusing on the motivational drivers of achievement, power, and affiliation. The narratives were analyzed quantitatively with a focus on the motivational drivers of achievement, power, and affiliation. Motive Disposition Theory, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count tool, and statistical tests in SPSS were used to assess motivational and linguistic-psychological differences.

This complex, multidirectional research makes it possible to obtain an authentic picture of the language use of bilingual young, university student people in Hungary and Jordan who speak English as a foreign language, from the perspective of the functioning of cultural patterns and schemas.

The theoretical section of the dissertation engages extensively with literature across cultural, cognitive, psycholinguistics, language pedagogy, cultural studies, and narrative analysis. This multidisciplinary approach enables the author to examine the phenomenon under study from multiple perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding.

The structure of the dissertation, including the sequence of chapters and the development of its argument, is carefully considered and logically organized. Following the introductory chapter, the theoretical background is established, while the third chapter presents the methodology of the complex study within the context of English as a second language. Chapters four, five, and six, which form the backbone of the dissertation, analyze the results of the three research methods. The seventh chapter summarizes the general conclusions and outlines avenues for further research. It is particularly commendable that the author also reflects on the limitations of the study in this chapter.

The language of the dissertation is clear, its style meets the expectations associated with scholarly prose, and the use of terminology is consistent.

The thesis argues convincingly that speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds use language not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of representing and categorizing their cultural experiences.

Below, with a constructive intention, I would like to offer a few comments regarding the research and the interpretation of its results.

1. In the methodology chapter, we learn that among the Jordanian participants in the first study there were 21 male and 43 female. In the second and third study the gender distribution varied between groups, with 37 females and 13 males among Hungarians and 42 females and 8 males among Jordanians (p. 51). This difference is statistically significant, which may distort the interpretation of the results and should not be left unexplained. As is well known, in designing a sample it is generally important to ensure a balanced representation of genders among the participants.
2. When discussing the results, it is not clarified whether significant differences emerged between male and female participants in any of the three studies. This dimension, however, can certainly be incorporated in subsequent analyses.
3. The aim of the study is to examine how cultural differences influence the second language production of Hungarian and Jordanian bilingual speakers. This necessarily entails a considerable degree of generalization about the characteristics of the two cultures, which carries the risk of treating the culture of a country as homogeneous and uniform in the analysis. Since in both countries the participants were university students between the ages

of 18 and 25, the results cannot be generalized to the entire bilingual population. Overgeneralization is evident in sentences that refer not only to younger university students as data providers of the research, but also to the speech, cognition and culture of bilingual Hungarian and Jordanian speakers in general:

*”Study 2 investigates the recurring themes and cultural patterns, examining how **Hungarian and Jordanian bilinguals** interpret and engage with complex interpersonal and social themes.’ (p. 1.)*

*”H1: **Both Hungarian and Jordanian bilinguals** will activate a common set of core schemas in their English narratives, reflecting their shared age cohort and exposure to globalized cultural influences” (p. 7)*

*”**Hungarian bilinguals**, coming from a more individualistic culture, are expected to focus on personal autonomy, self-fulfillment, and individual achievement, while Jordanian bilingual individuals – from a collectivist society – are likely to emphasize family bonds, group responsibilities, and social harmony.” (p. 27)*

*”The dual approach in this dissertation facilitates a comprehensive examination of how **Hungarian and Jordanian bilinguals** construct their narratives, enabling both a thematic exploration of their experiences and a quantitative assessment of the motivational drivers and cultural frameworks reflected in their storytelling.” (p. 34)*

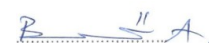
Of course, with more precise wording referring to the validity of the sample (bilingual young university students), such overgeneralized statements can easily be modified.

Based on the available data and the content of the dissertation, the work meets the requirements of research ethics.

I consider Ahmad S. Naji’s dissertation, which is based on rich empirical and theoretical research, suitable for public defence, and I support the recommendation that the candidate be awarded the PhD degree.

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