

## **Cultural Conceptualization in Persian Children's Stories: A Cognitive Study**

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### **Abstract**

The primary purpose of this research is to study cultural cognition and conceptualizations in Persian stories published for children. The problem of research is to determine which cultural conceptualizations are embedded in the texts of Persian children's stories. The methodological approach taken in this study is based on cultural linguistics. According to Sharifian (2017) cultural linguistics is based on the premise that many aspects of human languages encode cultural conceptualizations. In other words, cultural conceptualizations are embedded in many features of human languages. Cultural linguistics offers both a theoretical and an analytical framework to investigate the cultural conceptualizations underlying the human languages in practice. The theoretical framework of cultural linguistics contains the notion of "cultural cognition", which affords an integrated understanding of the notions of "cognition" and "culture" and the way these two concepts are related to language. This analytical framework provides some useful tools that allow us to examine features of human languages which encode conceptualizations and to analyze the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations. They contain the three major notions of "cultural schema", "cultural category", and "cultural metaphor". By cultural schemas we mean a culturally constructed subclass of "cognitive schemas" that are an invention of the cognitive sciences. Cultural schemas, which may in some cases encompass subschemas, are instantiated in many aspects of language. Sharifian (2014) believes that cultural schemas capture pools of knowledge that provide the basis for a significant portion of encyclopedic and pragmatic meanings in human languages. Additionally, they provide substantial foundation for the "common ground" i.e., the knowledge shared, or assumed to be shared, by the members of a speech

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community. Cultural schemas (and subschemas) include beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behaviour as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience. Members of a cultural group negotiate and renegotiate these schemas and pass them onto later generations. According to Shore (1996), cultural schemas may be instantiated through the use of language, in painting, rituals, and even in silence. Various levels and units of language such as morphosyntactic features, lexical items, speech acts, idioms, metaphors, discourse markers, etc., may be established in cultural schemas. Aspects of language that mainly draw on cultural schemas may expedite intra-cultural communication, while debilitating intercultural communication. Within a cultural group, the communication, which is based on cultural schemas, involves a much more fluid transfer of messages and yields more homogeneous interpretations than the communication which is based on idiosyncratic, individual-based schemas. This research introduces fundamental cultural schemas in the Persian childrens' stories within cultural linguistics analytical framework and analyses the determined schemas within metalinguistic discourse method which is developed by Sharifian and Tayebi (2017a, 2017b). For their analysis of perceptions of (im)politeness in Persian, Sharifian and Tayebi developed an innovative three-tier model consisting metadiscourse analysis level, discourse analysis level, and conceptual analysis level. Metadiscourse analysis focuses on identifying words or expressions frequently used by those participating in interactions describing (im)polite acts. In discourse analysis level, they identified the scenarios that had led to evaluations of (im)politeness. Eventually, in conceptual analysis, they examined the nature of the relationship between the perception and evaluation of (im)politeness and the implicating cultural conceptualizations, as well as the ethnography of related cultural conceptualizations. Some of these may remain unobserved by the interactants in the course of communication.

The statistical sample of this research consisted a corpus of 100 Persian stories published for children of A and B age groups (6-10 years old) during the time span of 1998-2018. Fifty-two interactions have been found in these stories among the characters. Thirty-one cultural schemas showing various cultural themes are identified by putting the interactions of the stories' characters within analytical framework of cultural linguistics. The findings indicate that three major macro schemas of sympathy, *taa'rof* (Iranian art of etiquette) and sense of regret have shown some repetitive schematic patterns which are themselves closely related to sub-schemas of cooperation, freedom seeking, hospitality, formality, and embarrassment. Silence plays an indispensable pragmatic role in macro-schema level and a considerable number of verbal interactions of the stories' characters are closely influenced by this metalinguistic element. Micro schema of solitariness is also embedded within macro schema of sympathy and regret. This consequently has had remarkable effect on verbal and nonverbal interactions of characters. The present study makes several noteworthy contributions to the elicitation of some of cultural schemas in Persian language. These schemas are reflected in common social interactions of children stories. They also enrich the literature relating to children stories. The evidence from this study, mainly the new list of schemas, will serve as a base for further probes in sociological and anthropological studies.

**Keywords:** Cultural linguistics, Cultural cognition, Cultural conceptualizations, Persian, Children stories