The Role of Content Schema and Cultural Differences in Reading Comprehension of Iranian and American Readers

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This study aims at investigating how cultural differences as background knowledge function in reading comprehension. More specifically, this line of inquiry is dealing with the role of content schema in reading comprehension. To provide plausible answers to the aforementioned questions, two groups of EFL Iranian students and native American university students were selected to participate in this study. The participants in Iranian group took a proficiency test of reading comprehension. The application of this proficiency test was deemed to be important insofar as this study investigated the role of content schema in reading comprehension of advanced readers. Accordingly, the proficiency of the participants needed to be checked before the main reading comprehensions. Participants of each group took four reading comprehension tests including two passages germane to Iranian culture and two closely associated with American culture. In order to analyze the obtained data, such statistical measures as Matched T-Test were run. The analyses of the data revealed that Iranian and American readers perform better in familiar culture-oriented texts than they do on conceptually unfamiliar texts. Also, it was revealed that content schema affects Iranian and American readers' performance on unfamiliar texts; empirical evidence proved the activation of content schema and its debilitative role in unfamiliar text.