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Bridging the Content-Form Divide:
Philological Aspects of Textual Analysis and the
Improvement of EFL/EAP Reading Comprehension
Proficiency

Long-Abstract

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. From the Initial Hypothesis to the Final Research Question.....	1
2.1. The development of the research question within the paradigm of action research	1
2.2. Three working hypotheses	2
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
3.1. Teaching English as a second or a foreign language and EAP	3
3.2. EFL learner motivation	5
3.3. Factors Hindering Adult SLA Acquisition	5
3.4. The diglossic state of the Arabic language	6
3.5. Making the most of school time and reducing the influence of socio-economic effects on achievement	6
3.6. Evolution in ESL reading comprehension theory	7
3.7. Higher order skills and lower order skills	8
3.8. The psycholinguistic model and schema theory	9
3.9. Top-down approaches and the interactive reading model: criticism and application in ESL11	
3.10. Automatic spreading activation and the “shared knowledge” assumption	11
3.11. Schema Theory	12
4. METHODOLOGY.....	13
4.1. Paradigm choice in SLA: constraints & boundaries	13
4.2. Action Research Theory & the Mixed Methods Approach.....	13
4.3. Action Research: Theory & Practice - Goal-oriented research.....	14
4.4. Validity & credibility.....	14
4.4.1. Dependability & peer review	14
5. RESEARCH PROCEDURE	15
5.1. Part one	15
5.2. Part two	16
5.3. Part three	16
5.3.1. Reasons for choosing the Bar-Ilan University EAP program for the experiment.....	16
5.3.2. Retrial following the quantitative success of the SLCH summer course experiment. (Longitudinal)	17
5.3.3. An additional layer of philological text studies	17
5.3.4. Thematic Organization & Thematic Testing.....	18

5.4.	Part four	19
5.5.	Part five.....	20
5.6.	Part six	21
6.	FINDINGS	22
6.1.	Part One	22
6.1.1.	The relationship between prior background SLCH knowledge and the understanding of the main idea of the text.....	22
6.1.2.	The relationship between L1 and global reading comprehension.....	22
6.2.	Part Two.....	23
6.3.	Part three: Quantitative Findings SLCH Experiment.....	23
6.3.1.	Introducing SLCH Instruction into EAP of EFL Bar-Ilan Learners	23
6.3.2.	A significant difference in the averages of the final exams	23
6.3.3.	Progress of L1 Hebrew speakers SLCH/Regular.....	24
6.3.4.	Progress of L1 Arabic speakers SLCH/Regular.....	24
6.3.5.	Longitudinal re-trial results of the SLCH experiment: An intermediate SLCH EAP group compared to three other control groups	25
6.4.	Part Four.....	25
6.5.	Part five.....	27
6.5.1.	Large Scale Questionnaire Findings	27
6.5.1.1.	Section One: Type and Frequency of the Terms Identified	27
6.5.1.2.	Section Two: Global Comprehension vs. SLCH Questions	27
6.5.1.3.	Section Three SLCH	28
6.6.	Part six	29
6.6.1.	The Findings of the EAP Lecturer Questionnaires	29
7.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	30
8.	References	a

1. INTRODUCTION

2. From the Initial Hypothesis to the Final Research Question

The initial problem and gap in knowledge underlying the research stemmed from the fact that the Israeli National English Curriculum stipulated that: "pupils (should) gain cultural, historical and social insight from reading un-adapted literary texts..., (should) become acquainted with norms and behaviors in a variety of cultures..., (should) develop critical perspectives toward different cultural values and norms. (Education.gov.il 2012) This has been stipulated, however, without providing the EFL teacher training institutions in Israel with the professional tool kit, or at least a set of precise recommendations as to how the goal of forming such future English teachers should be achieved. The initial hypothesis therefore was that in order to develop proficient independent (pupil)- readers with a critical outlook towards cultural norms and values, the English teacher trainees had to have a certain level of socio-linguistic, cultural and historic awareness of the English speaking world.

Therefore, in order to test whether it was necessary to introduce EFL teacher trainees to socio-linguistic historical and cultural studies, the initial-first part of the research has set out to determine the extent to which the understanding of cultural and historical references of an unabridged literary text affected global reading proficiency skills. If a positive connection between socio-linguistic, historical and cultural schema and the reading comprehension proficiency of unabridged literary texts was to be found, the research proposal then promised to discuss the issues of the systematic introduction and the building of such background knowledge for EFL teacher trainees in Israel and to suggest a socio-linguistic, cultural and historical (SLCH) studies syllabus designed for that purpose.

2.1. The development of the research question within the paradigm of action research

After the initial analysis of the qualitative and quantitative stages of the first two parts of the study, it became apparent that the lack of socio-linguistic, historical, and cultural knowledge represents a serious impediment to the reading comprehension of unabridged literary texts in English. In another, unexpected manner, however, the EFL teacher trainees identified this lack as one of the major problems hindering their reading comprehension proficiency on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tests.

Thus, by emphasizing the strong link between the lack or the possession of prior socio-linguistic, cultural and historic background knowledge in English and EAP reading proficiency,

the EFL teacher trainees have shifted the focus of the research from the general realm of TESOL to that of reading comprehension proficiency of foreign learners of English for academic purposes (EAP).

Thus having testified to the need in SLCH proficiency, the EFL teacher trainees have revealed to the researcher what they considered as one of the major pitfalls on their road to becoming proficient English readers. They have indeed placed a greater emphasis on the need for such SLCH proficiency from the point of view of EAP foreign language learners and not that of proficient and relatively confident English teachers. It was compelling and at the same time disturbing to witness future teachers from different institutions and in various –even the most final stages of their training- still refer to themselves as readers who were relatively ill at ease- especially when dealing with academic articles in English.

2.2. Three working hypotheses

The shift that occurs in the focus of the research is backed by the discussion relative to the significance of the choice of the research paradigm in *Mind and Context in Adult Second Language Acquisition: Methods, Theory and Practice*. Indeed, in her book, Christina Sanz reminds us of the importance of a "thorough continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" the purpose of which is to avoid forcing ones conclusions on the research" (Sanz, 2005). Thus, the first part of the research yielded perhaps not an entirely surprising, however, a slightly different and rather new hypothesis than at the outset. However, since this research is set within the paradigm of mixed-methods and bearing on the theoretical grounds of action research, it has been decided to allow the study to evolve gradually and to test the interesting hypothesis that has been advanced by the EFL teacher trainees.

Therefore, the research now set out to test the logical yet brave hypothesis put forward by the EFL teacher trainees as to the relationship between an improved EAP proficiency and an increased awareness of the SLCH knowledge of the English speaking world.

Henceforth, a bold experiment was designed in order to test whether the systematic introduction, exposure and enrichment of the SLCH related knowledge of terms present in academic reading comprehension proficiency tests would improve the understanding of the English language and the reading comprehension proficiency of EFL learners in EAP? Indeed, in addition to the regular formal text and word attack skills, the SLCH experiment included a pragmatic and a philological approach to EAP text studies.

The research has been comprised of three working hypotheses. Each research stage was aimed at verifying the particular hypothesis under study. Each of the three stages have been comprised of two parts – a quantitative and a qualitative one. Therefore, the overall study included six parts. The purpose of such a longitudinal mixed-methods design was to allow for triangulation, validity, generalization and transferability. Moreover, the actual part of the experiment lasted for about six months; the findings generated were re-tried and re-tested and in the final stages have been submitted to be peer reviewed by the leading figures on TESOL and EAP and education in Israel.

The first hypothesis tested the assumed relationship between prior knowledge of the SLCH references and the reading comprehension of an unabridged literary text. Having found a relationship between the two however with a surprising and an unexpected twist, the first part of the research has generated a new working hypothesis. Therefore, the second stage of the study examined the axiomatic relationship between an increase in SLCH background knowledge and the improvement of EAP reading comprehension proficiency. Finally, the third stage of the study sought quantitative confirmation, peer review and dependability of the data gathered in the previous stages of the study.

Hypothesis one: The lack of prior background SLCH knowledge will hinder reading comprehension proficiency of EFL learners when reading an unabridged literary text.

Hypothesis two: The systematic introduction, exposure and enrichment of the SLCH related knowledge of terms present in academic reading articles would improve the understanding of the English language and the reading comprehension proficiency of EFL learners in EAP.

Hypothesis three: A large-scale sample of students will prove reluctant to the idea of additional SLCH content on their EAP programs. (In line with the generally held belief about the purely structural character of EAP studies).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Teaching English as a second or a foreign language and EAP

Teaching English as a Foreign Language establishes an important discrimination as to the use of the terms English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Indeed, ESL most commonly refers to the first or second generations of immigrants into English speaking countries who use English for various everyday communicative and

integrative purposes (Broughton, Brumfit, et. al, 1980). This permanent exposure to English has given it its status of the second language. Nevertheless, the term EFL refers to English as acquired outside the immediate exposure to the language. Broughton, Brumfit et. al. explain that outside the previously mentioned context of ESL “in the rest of the world English is a foreign language. That is it is taught in schools, but it does not play an essential role in the national or social life.” The authors add that it refers to a situation when “the average citizen does not need English or any other foreign language to live his daily life or even for social or professional advancement.” (Broughton, Brumfit, et. al, 1980, p.6). Issue with this claim can nevertheless be taken as due to the advent of the internet and cyber communication tools some businesses have decided to adapt an English only policy and that is even if the country is a non English speaking one.

Moreover, since professional advancement does not merely entail the ability to write emails, negotiate or sign contracts, but it also presupposes academic qualifications, English and in particular English for Academic Purposes (EAP) reveals itself of great importance to numerous language learners. In addition, EAP in its broader sense does not merely refer to reading comprehension skills. Indeed, EAP includes all four language skills relevant not only to language proficiency but also to academic literacy and various other types of performance- such as giving presentation, taking notes, critically comparing and discussing an issue and etc’. Furthermore, EAP is not merely the domain of foreign language learners. Numerous American and British universities run general academic skills programs the aim of which is to introduce their graduate to the rules of academic writing and provide them with academic reading comprehension skills. Native English speakers are obviously also possess a different degree of English proficiency in general and of EAP proficiency in particular. (Rampton, 1990).

Thus it would be erroneous to consider the EAP as the exclusive realm of foreign language acquisition. However, since this study has been conducted in a foreign -non English native speaking country- the EAP skills discussed only refer to those acquired by foreign language learners. In order to emphasize this point, the abbreviations of EFL EAP learners would be widely used throughout this research.

In Israel, EAP courses mainly refer to academic reading comprehension proficiency. The Council for Higher Education has issued a law obliging all the universities and colleges to make sure that their students graduate with at least a certain level of reading comprehension proficiency (Council for Higher Education in Israel -CHE, 2016). Currently under a roughless

attack under the form of free online courses and a digitalized testing system (Haaretz, 2016), these courses – or exemption level requirements of English do not go in line with the European framework of language learning and teaching. Most stark perhaps is the difference between the importance accorded to the primacy of reading over all the other language skills. No such primacy is recommended by the Common European Framework for Foreign Language Teaching (the CEFR) that vividly acknowledges the simultaneous contribution of all four language skills to the improvement of foreign language proficiency (COE-CEFR framework, 2016).

3.2.EFL learner motivation

Other than the societal attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language, whether someone is a weak or a good learner and the influence of peers, Jeremy Harmer mentions the teacher and the method as significant drive towards motivation. He explains that “clearly the teacher is a major factor in the student’s motivation to learn” (Harmer, 2006, p.52) and that the teacher must show enthusiasm towards EFL. Moreover, Harmer emphasizes the critical role that the teaching method has both on the learner and the instructor. He states: “It is vital that both teacher and students have some confidence in the way teaching and learning take place. When either loses confidence, motivation can be disastrously affected, but when both are comfortable with the method being used, success is much more likely.” (Harmer, 2006, p.52).

Finally, the importance of interesting classes could never be emphasized enough. This is true is general but is also particularly critical in adult education. (Rogers, 1997). Harmer maintains that “if students are to continue to be intrinsically motivated they clearly need to be interested both in the subject they are studying and in the activities and the topics that they are presented with.” (Harmer, 2006, p.54). He adds that the choice of material to take to class will be crucial too, but even more important than this will be the ways in which it is used in the lesson.” (Harmer, 2006, p.54) Furthermore, as far as adult EFL learners are concerned the additional factors such as L1 interference and overall proficiency may obviously also represent some of the factors hindering or improving motivation.

3.3.Factors Hindering Adult SLA Acquisition

Continuing the discussion regarding the other internal factors that may affect the adult second or foreign language learner Sanz also mentions such criteria as motivation and the desire to immerse in the culture of the learnt language (Sanz, 2005). While Sanz is referring to findings relative to children, it is not difficult to see how these criteria easily translate to adult second

and foreign language acquisition. Moreover, going over the scientific literature pertaining to the relationship between the literacy level in the L1, the L2, the L3 and multilingualism, Sanz suggests that there is certain evidence lent to the credence that the proficiency and literacy level in the L1 strongly affects further studies of the L2 and the L3.

3.4.The diglossic state of the Arabic language

As the experiment was set-up in conditions where the majority of the EAP EFL learners were L1 Arabic speakers, the diglossic situation of this language was placing an additional layer of difficulty on the experimenter. Indeed, the situation of the Arabic language is that in various regions, sometimes even in neighboring villages the spoken dialect can be extremely different, thus creating a myriad of spoken Arabic languages (Ibrahim, Aharon-Perets, 2005). In contrast to this, the literary Arabic, a language that is used in the media in articles, publications and books is an extremely complex grammatical unit more often than not phonetically distant from the "lower" dialects spoken at home (Ibrahim, Aharon-Perets, 2005). This is a particularly difficult situation because, in most native language acquisition processes phonological familiarity on behalf of the child with the written form greatly induces and facilitates the acquisition of literacy skills. This situation relevant to the literacy skills of Arabic L1 learners is further complicated since literary L1 Arabic instructors often use a third- medium language in order to help bring closer and remediate to the phonological differences between the "lower" and "higher" forms of the language (Ibrahim, Aharon-Perets, 2005).

3.5.Making the most of school time and reducing the influence of socio-economic effects on achievement

The SLCH experiment supposed that by approaching the study of academic articles not merely from a linguistic-structural point of view as is generally the case in the EAP teaching practice and as it can be witnessed from the compilation of the EAP course book exercises (Appendix 32), but by integrating into the traditional EAP textual study mode also aspects of philological and of pragmatical studies in order to simultaneously increase exposure both to language and to academic conceptual terms and ideas in the field of the humanities, the zone of proximal development- both the linguistic and the thematical zones- will gradually reduce the gap between the level of the conceptual academic and linguistic knowledge required in order to become a proficient reader and the actual level of the EAP students. Since language is a system of interdependent meaning between the sign and the signifier as well as between the cognitive boundaries placed by one signifier on the definition of the other (Saussure,1965), the mere

instruction of the form of the foreign word not beckoned or corresponding to a pre-existing comprehensive reality in the mind of the language learner is not merely ineffective but is even socially unfair. Indeed, not making sure that the EFL learner possess the cognitive tools in order to comprehend a translation or an explanation equates to even further entrenching illiteracy problems beckoned by lower socio-economic status (UNESCO report on The Social and Economic Impact of Illiteracy, 2010) and Hart and Risley (1995).

By discussing the meaning of words and the ideas behind them, we simultaneously tempted to improve the "Mathew effect" mentioned by E.D. Hirsch (Hirsch, 2003) and coined by Keith Stanovich. Hirsch uses the Mathew effect as a metaphor that implies that those learners whose vocabulary levels are poor will have an even greater difficulty to catch up with those learners whose vocabulary level is richer (Hirsch, 2003). The reason for that is the more word and world knowledge a learner possesses the easier it is for them to acquire and assimilate new words. Hope, however, resides in the fact that the Mathew effect relates to the non-instructional, "natural" gradual – or ‘incidental’ vocabulary acquisition that results from the exposure of the child to linguistic content. Indeed, Hirsch explains that via ‘explicit vocabulary instruction’ the Mathew effect can be reduced- perhaps not entirely but at least to a certain level.

3.6. Evolution in ESL reading comprehension theory

Theories in reading comprehension were flourishing during the 1970's amidst a growing need to understand the American major national literacy problems. The first problem was imparting basic literacy to those who most need it and the second problem was raising language comprehension in the entire population Orasanu (1986). While ample efforts were being done in the field of decoding, it is in order to remediate to the problem of comprehension that a high priority was given to the development of an explicit theory of how people communicate and comprehend Orasanu (1986). Thorough data existed on various aspects of decoding (legibility of type, patterns of eye movements, rates of information processing and the like), however, with comprehension being the major purpose of reading, there was a growing need to investigate the higher mental processes of the act of reading Orasanu (1986). Gradually, advancements in the field of reading comprehension in L1- or the native language- began to permeate the field of second and foreign language acquisition.

Carrell (1988) explains that prior to the 1970, reading in a second language was perceived as an auxiliary to oral language skills. Moreover, the trend of structural linguistics and contrastive analysis developed by Fries and Lado in the 1960s, endorsed the importance of the grapheme-

phoneme relationship, mainly putting an emphasis on the processes of decoding and deciphering in EFL. While in theory, the importance of cultural bound background knowledge was somewhat acknowledged, in practice, prior the advent of the psycholinguistic model of reading, this did not translate itself into methodological steps, Carell (1988).

According to Carell (1988) “The sequential-behaviourist view of reading comprehension focused mainly on the importance of decoding and letter-sound connection”. The understanding of the meaning of the text, moreover, was perceived as residing only within the text and in the ability of the reader to decipher it. Penney (1986) adds that the practice of the mechanical ability to decipher symbols and then connect them into words was considered as a sufficient tool for developing reading comprehension skills.

It is extremely important to emphasize that the relatively new and additional theories in reading comprehension do not denigrate the importance of fluent decoding, however, reading comprehension is no longer perceived as the automatic outcome of the process of decoding and of the mastering of "lower level skills". In other words, the meaning of the text cannot be “poured in” into the reader’s mind only via a bottom-up reading process. According to the new interactive view on reading, adequate understanding occurs only when the lower level skills – pertaining to the bottom-up view of reading- and the higher level skills- pertaining to the top-down view of reading- are operating together.

It is important to notice that the lower level skills such as decoding and understanding the message on the level of small passages, are by no means "low" or unimportant. There is ample research evidence that shows that the more proficient a reader is, the more "automatic" the lower skills are. Indeed, the ability to free cognitive resources by quickly and effortlessly processing and decoding, allows to wire up the attention towards the understanding of meaning in context. Grabe explains that “the automatic processing of forms frees cognitive space for thinking about what was being read”. (Grabe, 1988, p.62) Thus, "automaticity" of the lower order skills is in fact a stepping stone for the higher order skills.

3.7.Higher order skills and lower order skills

In *the Practice of English Language Teaching*, Jeremy Harmer explains that “a frequent distinction is made-especially in the analysis of reading-between top-down and bottom-up processing.” (Harmer, J., 2006, p. 201). He uses a metaphor “between looking down on something from above by getting an overview, and, on the contrary, being in the middle of something and understanding where we are by concentrating on all the individual features. It

is the difference between looking at a forest, or studying the individual trees within it.” (Harmer, J., 2006, p. 201).

In professional reading comprehension language, the lower level skills command the ability to deal with "close or intensive reading questions"- on the paragraph or sentence level, while the higher level skills correspond to the ability to answer "global reading questions"- on the level of the entire text or major sections of it Nuttall (1987). The close or the intensive reading questions do not necessitate a global understanding of the main idea of the text. In other words, according to the common premises in EAP it is perfectly possible to understand a particular sentence or paragraph within a text and to even answer a question correctly about that specific paragraph, without understanding the main idea of the entire text. However, if the higher order skills and the top-down ability- of seeing the text as a whole- instead of focusing on details- is not activated, it would be hard or even impossible to find the correct answer to global reading questions such as; what is the main idea of the text, what is the purpose of the research or what are the conclusions/recommendations that can be drawn based on the research Nuttall, (1982).

Harmer clarifies that reading for the main idea, i.e., “gist reading (...) is not a lazy option. The reader (...) has made a choice not to attend to every detail, but to use their processing powers to get more of a top-down view”. (Harmer, 2006, p.202) Indeed, the top-down approach and higher-order skills demand greater concentration, higher synthetical and analytical abilities and various other important factors, such as the ability to make correct inferences and the validation of the "shared knowledge assumption", as well as the proper activation of the associations of prior background knowledge as the principles of "schema theory" suggest. Nuttall (1982)

3.8.The psycholinguistic model and schema theory

The psycholinguistic model of reading has revolutionized the pre-existing bottom-up emphasis both in English as L1 and in EFL. Goodman (1967) described reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing-game”. The reader was now perceived as reconstructing the message not only based on his or hers grapheme-phoneme, syntactical and semantical knowledge- working one’s way up towards understanding - but also based on his or hers ability to predict meaning and relate it to their past experiences and knowledge of the world.

Thus, there was a substantial shift in the focus and the importance of the background knowledge of the reader and his ability to understand the message implied by the writer. Comprehension was no longer flowing “naturally” from mere decoding and deciphering, it was now actively engaging and interacting with the experience and the knowledge of the reader. Therefore, “the

second language reader began to be viewed as actively interacting with the text while sampling some of its parts, making predictions and verifying them”. (Carrell, 1988, p.3). “In 1979, Coady elaborated on this basic psycholinguistic model for ESL reading and suggested a model in which the ESL reader’s background knowledge interacts with conceptual abilities and process strategies to produce comprehension.” (Coady, 1979)

The psycholinguistic model has promulgated a top-down approach in foreign language reading comprehension. According to this view, the reader’s linguistic proficiency interacts with his knowledge of the world and with his cognitive abilities. These cognitive skills include: inferring, association making, predicting, synthesizing and drawing logical conclusions. Carrell reports that the impact of Goodman’s psycholinguistic theory resulted in the understanding that the ESL reader as “an active participant in the reading process, making and confirming predictions, primarily from his own background knowledge of the various linguistic levels (graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic in the broadest sense of that term)”, (Carrell, 1988, p.3).

It is possible to extrapolate that by “semantics in the broadest sense” Carrell refers to the pragmatic and contextual shifts in the meaning of words. As far as pragmatic variations in meaning are concerned, Harmer (2006) explains that the difficulty of reading comprehension tasks lies in both in the pragmatic value of words as well as the distance (time and space), that separates the reader from the writer. For language learning purposes, reading and listening are considered receptive skills, however, the difference between authentic reading and listening purposes is that the reader cannot simply ask the writer what was it that they meant. Therefore, the reader’s ability to activate the correct pragmatic meaning is extremely important. It obviously engages both the text and the reader’s different strata of background knowledge. For the reader to meet “the shared knowledge assumption” they must possess- at least to a certain degree- the schema knowledge appropriate for that task.

It is important to notice that the introduction of the top-down approach in ESL reading comprehension, was so ground-breaking that some began to believe that it could serve as a substitute to the bottom-up decoding approach. However, only depending on the top-down approach to reading comprehension in EAP is just as partial and incomplete as merely supposing that comprehension can be achieved based only on decoding and deciphering. The top-down and the bottom-up approaches to reading comprehension complement each other.

For the ESL learner to become a proficient reader these processes must interact. Thus, a critical discussion of the interactive model as well as of the top down approach follows herein.

3.9. Top-down approaches and the interactive reading model: criticism and application in ESL

The recognition of the importance of prior background knowledge and of its several subdivisions such as “formal schema”, “linguistic schema” and “content schema” (Carrell, 1988, p. 4) has resulted in ESL practitioners believing that these skills could be “transferred” from the learner’s L1, thus unfoundedly supposing that the aforementioned skills even exist in the L1. This assumption is wrong because not all SLA or EFL learners- not even the adult ones- are necessarily literate. Even if they are literate, it is wrong to assume that reading has the same status in other cultures (and languages) as it has in English.

3.10. Automatic spreading activation and the “shared knowledge” assumption

Moreover, Stanovitch “has also incorporated the concept of spreading activation, by means of which related lexical forms (that is, closely related in some way in the mental organization of the lexicon) become automatically available in reading.” Grabe (1988). This concept, growing out of the logogen recognition theory, also allows us to consider schemata selection as a more manageable process. Stanovitch argues that semantically related memory locations, nearby in the network, are made available or activated automatically. Those memory locations not automatically activated remain unaffected. Automatic spreading activation is fast acting and does not use attentional capacity; it is a type of context effect not controlled by the reader.

The importance of the automatic activation of relevant meaning and associations of the terms read brings us to the concept of the “shared knowledge assumption”. Penney (1986) states that “authors use certain conventions of writing, leaving out information they know the reader will provide, based on shared knowledge of language, culture and communication. Obviously, if the shared knowledge assumption is not met, the author's message may be misunderstood.” (Penney, 1986, p. 2).

Thus, if the reader is incapable of activating the relevant background knowledge and of correctly associating it with other factors that are not explicitly mentioned by the text but instead are expected to be inferred, then comprehension would either be impossible, erroneous or partially incomplete. Moreover, even if the particular prior-knowledge necessary for the

appropriate understanding of the text exists within the mind of the reader, it does not necessarily mean that the world of associations that it commands is bound to generate the inference that the writer expects. It is therefore not surprising that citing Bartlett, Steffensen, Joag-dev & Anderson, Penney adds that "Readers from different cultural backgrounds interpret and remember the same story differently." (Penney, 1986, p. 2). The discussion of the logogen and of automatic spreading activation stems from schema theory. Indeed, in his *Schemata: The Building Blocks of Cognition*, David Rumelhart, explains that schema theory "is a theory of how knowledge is represented" (Rumelhart, 1980, p. 33-34) This theory is at the center of our study, therefore, a definition of terms and a discussion of schema theory is presented.

3.11. Schema Theory

Providing a review of the use of the term (schema or schemata) by philosophers and psychologists, Rumelhart (1981, p. 33) asserts that "schemata are the building blocks of cognition. They are the fundamental elements upon which all information processing depends." He explains that "all knowledge is packaged into units". The importance of schema theory, not just in generating meaning, but also in enabling the reader to make the right logical association, draw conclusions or make inferences is therefore paramount. Rumelhart advances that "variable constraints" serve two important functions in schema theory. They help identify the variable meaning of the item read.

Furthermore, Anderson and Pearson advance that for meaningful learning to occur "the already-known general ideas "subsume" or "anchor" the new propositions found in texts. This happens only when the existing ideas are stable, clear, discriminable from other ideas and directly relevant to the to-be-understood prepositions." (1988, p. 41.) The relationship between pre-existing knowledge and the new information processed is crucial for the constituting of a mental picture in the mind of the reader. Horn, in his *Methods of Instruction in the Social Studies* reiterates the idea that a "the author does not really convey ideas to the reader; he merely stimulates him to construct them out of his own experience. If the concept is new to the reader its construction more nearly approaches problem solving than simple association." Horn, (1937). Anderson and Pearson conclude their schema theoretic view of basic processes by advocating for the need of "a complete theory of schema activation model (...) with a major role for inference, and (...) reliance on knowledge of particular cases as well as abstract and general schemata." (Anderson and Pearson, 1988, p.53.)

Moreover, the areas of schema knowledge are often categorized by different domains. The three categories proposed by Carrell (1988) are: “linguistic schema”, “content schema” and “formal schema”. The linguistic schema relates to the various process of language proficiency and the automaticity of these processes. Content schema relates to the general and background knowledge of the reader. Formal schema relates to the understanding of the various structures and types of texts. She adds that “research relative to English as L1 and as an ESL showed that an improvement in content schema and in formal schema equated to a substantial improvement in reading comprehension proficiency.”

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Paradigm choice in SLA: constraints & boundaries

The choice of the research method and paradigm is paramount. This choice not only affects the research procedure but also the findings and the recommendations of the research. Cristina Sanz explains that within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research methodology "can be classified as quantitative or qualitative, (that) it may be either cross-sectional or longitudinal and (that) mixed-designs are (becoming) increasingly common" (2005, p.5). Sanz advances that in such a complex field as the SLA, a field that is interdisciplinary in its nature and that encompasses psychology, neuroscience, linguistics and educational theory to name but a few, avoiding the trap of placing preconceived notions on the data is facilitated by the right choice of the paradigm and the method. (2005, p.84)

4.2. Action Research Theory & the Mixed Methods Approach

In order to help the researcher overcome the dualities presented by the two traditional qualitative and quantitative paradigms, Valach, Young and Lynam, (2002) propose the application of action research theory. Action research is an approach that has been enabled by the use of the mixed-methods methodology. Mixed methods methodology is the evolution of what has been previously considered as two differing paradigms- sometimes assumed to be opposites (Newman & Benz, 1998).

The importance, therefore, of the mixed-method approach lies within the fact that it enables the researcher to overcome this traditional dichotomic view and allows for the collection and the analysis of both forms of data in a single study during its different stages (Creswell, Tashakkori, Jensen, Shapley, 2003). The merging of the two different methodological approaches, the quantitative and the qualitative, helps generate a fuller picture. It facilitates the creation of new knowledge that would have otherwise been impossible to achieve. Therefore,

this study will borrow on the mixed-methods methodology within the paradigm of action research. This research paradigm has been chosen to best suit the purposes as a comprehensive, integrative and evolving study within EFL.

4.3. Action Research: Theory & Practice - Goal-oriented research

This study set out an experiment testing the relationship between increasing the background knowledge of the SLCH in English and the academic reading comprehension proficiency of EFL learners in our everyday professional practice. Indeed, according to (Valach, Young and Lynam, 2002 pp.2-3) "action research can be seen as a language for use in researching applied tasks that humans engage in in their everyday lives". Moreover, in *Qualitative Data Analysis* Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that one of the characteristics of action theory research is that the research question itself stems from action and is closely linked to the researcher's project or career. In addition to resolving the age-old dichotomy between research and practice, therefore, action research can also be perceived as goal-oriented research. Thus, it is recognized that the specific research questions emerge not only from action but also from the identification of the researcher's goals. While the method of action research pertains to the paradigm of qualitative studies (Morse, 1994), the principles of validity and credibility can still be maintained there.

4.4. Validity & credibility

In qualitative research, the notion of internal validity can be related to credibility and external validity to transferability." (Adams, Fujii, and Mackey, 2005, p. 86) Moreover, the notion of validity rests on the understanding of a single reality and therefore cannot be directly translated into qualitative research, which rests on the assumption of multiple, constructed realities. Thus, rather than determining that their findings are consistent with one single truth, qualitative researchers seek to demonstrate that their findings are credible to their research population. (Adams, Fujii, and Mackey, 2005, p. 86)

4.4.1. Dependability & peer review

In addition to validity and transferability, the qualitative part of the research can also be enhanced by dependability. The researcher can demonstrate dependability by seeking the examination and review of peers working in the same field Johnson (1990). In the conclusion of their *Research Methodology: Qualitative Research chapter*, Adams, Fujii & Mackey, assert that the use of qualitative research yields valuable insights into the L2 learning process helping us to understand certain aspects of discourse and practice that would have otherwise been

difficult to account for. They add that if "proper standards of empirical rigor are met through triangulation of research perspectives, cyclical data collection and analysis and the consideration of emic perspectives to ensure credibility, transferability and dependability, the qualitative" paradigm can be a potent tool for enriching our understanding of the SLA (Adams, Fujii, and Mackey, 2005, p. 88)

5. RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Our research permanently evolves within the mixed-methods paradigm in the field of action research. The full methodological definition of our research is a longitudinal case study in action research using the mixed-methods paradigm. As previously stated, the research began with a particular hypothesis, only to see it gradually evolve towards the end of the first two parts. Overall there are six parts to this study. The principles of validity and generalization are maintained here by the extensive recourse to the triangulation of the research methods and tools. There is a continuous chronological and logical cause and effect continuity between the six parts of the study. All the ethical aspects relative to the rules of academic research practices have been thoroughly respected throughout the study. Aspects relative to the limitations that researcher role and involvement within the boundaries of action theory have been given consideration in the analysis and discussion of the findings. The first two parts of the study are the corner stone instrumental in the generation of the research hypothesis that has set the conditions for the experiment in the following stages.

5.1.Part one

In order to determine the extent to which the lack of prior background SLCH knowledge hindered the understanding the main idea of an un-abridged literary text, a questionnaire has been designed for the purposes of a statistical quantitative study. For the detail of the consent form and detailed procedure, the questions, question description, the questionnaire procedures as well as the reasons underlying the choice of the unabridged short story that the questionnaire was based on please view Appendix 3. This part of the experiment has included 43 EFL teacher trainees from two different colleges in the north of Israel. The findings in this part were quantitative in their nature.

5.2.Part two

Qualitative semi-structured in depth interviews were then conducted with the EFL teacher trainees who have answered the questionnaires in part one. For procedure descriptions please view Appendix 16. The analysis of the findings in this part generated a further hypothesis as to the relationship between SLCH knowledge and an improved reading proficiency of EAP test (Appendix 16). As indeed most ESL teacher trainees regretted the fact that they did not possess enough SLCH knowledge of the English speaking world and suggested that this was the reason underlying their difficulty on EAP reading comprehension tests. They have put forward a hypothesis as to the strong relationship between an increased SLCH awareness and an improved proficiency on EAP tests (Appendix 16).

5.3.Part three

Based on the findings in the second part of the study, an experiment was set-up in order to test the hypothesis that an increase in SLCH background knowledge would result in an improved reading comprehension proficiency of EAP learners. As prior background and schema knowledge was intuitively linked by the researcher and the teacher trainees with the ability to improve reading comprehension skills, and with the literature review having proven it on the level of the English as a mother tongue (Hirsch, 2003), we decided to check whether an increased exposure to additional historical, cultural and socio-linguistic knowledge would result in a greater improvement of reading comprehension skills.

For a detailed description of the procedure please view the corpus of the thesis, for a brief overview please read below.

5.3.1. Reasons for choosing the Bar-Ilan University EAP program for the experiment

The advanced Bar-Ilan English for Academic Purposes reading comprehension course, has provided the researcher with the perfect opportunity to conduct the experiment, as not only one, but two, same level groups opened simultaneously. Moreover, setting up the experiment in a Bar-Ilan university EAP program has allowed the researcher to be completely independent and unbiased as far the final exam was concerned. As the experiment set out to test the importance of introducing undergraduates to schema of socio-linguistic, historical and cultural references present in the academic articles at their EAP proficiency level, a prior knowledge or the combination of both teaching and writing the final exams on behalf of the lecturer would have simply made the experiment impossible. Indeed, it could have been argued that the

lecturer has simply prepared the group according to the subject of the reading comprehension article that they knew they would give on the final exam. The findings were based on quantifiable independent factors, i.e., the grades received by the students on their final, anonymous –free of researcher intervention- exams.

5.3.2. Retrial following the quantitative success of the SLCH summer course experiment. (Longitudinal)

On the level of the academic time frame, the SLCH experiment was held during a summer course. It was obviously impossible to plan a longitudinal study before establishing whether the initial experiment was successful. When the experiment turned out to be successful, and that the proof of this success was not only qualitative but also quantitative, the precepts of the SLCH experiment have been retried on a full academic four months EAP semester. That was done in order to avoid such considerations as a - one of success - or claims relevant to the condensed nature of the summer course. Thus the overall experiment lasted for almost six months and was based on a study of six groups altogether: two groups have been exposed to additional SLCH content and four control groups that followed the regular/traditional EAP program.

5.3.3. An additional layer of philological text studies

The experiment set out to test whether the introduction of pragmatic considerations of lexical meaning as well as text analysis techniques akin to a certain level of philological studies alongside the traditional structural reading comprehension techniques would have a positive outcome on EFL proficiency in EAP learners. It has been decided to introduce rather small scale organizational "add-ons" in order to increase student exposure to the SLCH references commonly found on EAP articles in English. These "add-on" changes consisted of: thematic organization and thematic testing, explicit vocabulary and SLCH references instruction. (according to the precepts of adult SLA vocabulary acquisition) an insistence on developing a higher order ability of inference and the ability to make logical connections as well as the introduction of an authentic purpose for reading (according to the precepts of reading comprehension and the issues raised by the difficulty of the acquisition of higher order skills). While the theoretical backing behind the aforementioned professional concepts and fields has been detailed in the theoretical framework chapter, by detailing our procedure some of the concepts that the experiment draws upon will be briefly reminded.

5.3.4. Thematic Organization & Thematic Testing

Consistent with Krashen's advice as to the focus on particular subject areas in EFL until they are properly mastered by the learners (Krashen, 1981), the following steps were undertaken to increase student overall comprehension. Firstly, the number of the texts that are taught on the program was reduced from 23 to eight texts. Thus, the first attempt to improve the quality and depth of study, instead of the quantity, was made. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the texts were not taught randomly without any connection or thematic logic, but instead they were organized by adjacent similar themes. There were three major thematic groups.

The building up of denotational and connotational content schema in EFL

Based on the influential article by E.D. Hirsch Jr. (2003), my experimental SLCH content mediation "add-on" program was not merely based on the thematic repetition and the reworking of ideas by studying several related texts, but it was also based on the explicit instruction and the testing of word and world knowledge present in the articles of the course. Due to the cognitive barriers of adult second language acquisition, explicit instruction is an important concept in adult SLA practice (Sanz, 2005, p.4). Thus, when reading a new text together in the classroom, within the SLCH group type classroom all the new words as well as all the socio-linguistic, cultural and historical references were not only defined and discussed, but also explicitly written in the online glossary list of the course (Appendix 49).

The explanations of the SLCH references were provided in order to shed light onto to the reason why the author is mentioning this particular reference in the text and how it is connected to other SLCH references and the main idea of the text. The standard procedure that has been used was to ask why the author mentions a particular term, what it means and what are the connotations and the logical inferences that may be drawn from it, and how is it connected to the previously mentioned references in the text under study or in the previous ones. Thus acting the researcher was trying to explicitly enhance the students' word and world knowledge of academic articles in English in the humanities and the social sciences. In addition, the SLCH experiment tried to improve the students' ability to make logical connections and to draw inferences of the SLCH terms defined. Thus, the first stage constituted building up the 'definitional'- denotational knowledge of what a particular term referred to in the real world and the second stage constituted building up the logical and associative connections between the various phenomena discovered during the lessons.

This second stage is a higher order cognitive skill and is indeed one of the main problems referred to by Hirsch and Stahl. Hirsch cites Stahl in order to maintain that a full flexible knowledge of a word involves an understanding of the core meaning of a word and how it changes in different contexts. (Hirsch, 2003). According to Stahl, "to know a word, we do not only need to have definitional knowledge of the logical relationship into which a words enters, (...) but we also need to understand how the word's meaning adapts to different contexts (Hirsch, 2003). Stahl refers to this type of word knowledge as "contextual" and adds that children exposed to words in multiple contexts, even without explicit instruction, can be presumed to learn more about those words than students who see a word in a single context" (Hirsch, 2003).

5.4.Part four

This stage was based on in-depth interviews with the participants of the SLCH experiment. Indeed, this qualitative stage has made it possible to render the non-quantifiable aspects of the SLCH experiment. After the summer course was over and while the procedures of the course were still fresh in the minds of the students so that they could feedback on them, I emailed invitations asking them to interview for the purpose of my PhD research. While generally email requests get a fairly low response rate, in my case almost half the classroom immediately volunteered to interview. I ended up interviewing ten students. The interviews were held at the college and lasted for about an hour. In the beginning of each interview, a consent form detailing the fact that this interview is non-obligatory and that it does not affect their grades in any way was signed.

Charts representing the thematic color-coding of the subjects that were the most recurrent on the interview are presented in the corpus of the thesis in appendices 5-12. The large volume of these appendices has made it impossible to reproduce here (in the long abstract document). In order to view the appendices please refer to the full corpus of the Phd thesis. All the interviews have been transcribed and translated from Hebrew into English. Since the purpose of this part of the study was to provide content and not to dwell on the stylistic aspects of translation of the various register and accuracy levels of the use of the Hebrew language these aspects have not been rendered in English. The findings of the content analysis were then retried on the level of a large scale statistically significant group in the fifth part of the study.

5.5.Part five

The findings based on the in-depth semi-structured interviews have generated an extremely positive view of the SLCH experiment program. Traditionally however, both in Israel and abroad EAP instruction focuses mainly on the instruction of the structural, formal aspects of patterns of text organization. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Learning and Teaching* explains that in EAP however, it is only the levels of textual organization as well as of morpho-syntaxis that are being systematically and thoroughly addressed: “in EAP teaching has involved helping students understand the organizational and stylistic features of professional and academic genre” (Byram, 2000). Therefore, in order to test the third working hypothesis relative to the fact that EAP learners would prefer to shun from additional SLCH content as is the generally held belief among EAP lecturers and in order to verify the ability to statistically generalize the findings generated in part four, the 107 advanced level EAP students who have agreed to fill in the questionnaires had to be introduced to the concept of the SLCH.

However, the experimenter had to overcome one major underlying difficulty: for indeed for the participants of the large scale part of the study, it would have been impossible to assess the importance of a socio-linguistic phenomenon such as the SLCH or share their opinion about its relevance to EAP instruction without knowing what SLCH references were. It is therefore for this purpose that the large scale questionnaire was comprised of three distinctive parts (Appendix 13). Based on an excerpt chosen from one of the EAP articles on the advanced level curriculum the first part of the questionnaire required the participants to identify any word or clusters of words that they (having read the text) still did not understand despite of the use of the dictionary- (electronic or hardcopy version).

The words and the clusters of words that have been identified by the students have then been quantified and statistically analyzed by the researcher. The second stage of the questionnaire was comprised of a series of EAP and SLCH related questions. This stage had been added following a pilot of the initial version of the questionnaire that only included two parts. The reason behind this procedure is that "Poor readers often do not even recognize that they do not understand" (Nuttall, 1987 p.10). Therefore, the series of reading comprehension and SLCH related questions was added in order to make-sure that the students do not pretend that they have simply understood everything. Moreover, this step was also introduced in order to discourage students from filling in the third part of the questionnaire relative to their perception of the importance of the SLCH to their EAP studies too quickly and absentmindedly. The third

part of the questionnaire dealt with the attitudes of EAP learners as to the extent in which they would like to see SLCH as part of their EAP studies. The purpose of this third section was to see whether a statistical basis of generalization could be applied to the findings following the content based analysis of the SLCH experiment.

Furthermore, the second stage of the questionnaire containing SLCH & EAP questions has also provided for an opportunity to retry the findings relative to the relationship between the ability to answer 6 and more SLCH background knowledge questions correctly and global reading proficiency skills (as demonstrated in the findings of the first part of the study). As the previous results have been based on an unabridged literary text and on answers by EFL teacher trainees, it was interesting to see whether the same correlation would be found on an excerpt from an academic article filled in by advanced level EAP learners.

5.6.Part six

The purpose of the qualitative part of the third stage of the study was also twofold. It aimed at providing a fuller picture of the findings generated in the study as well as an opportunity for peer review- thus enhancing the dependability of some of the qualitative aspects of the study. This was achieved by conducting un-structured in-depth interviews with EAP lecturers and with various leading figures and scholars in the field of education and in TESOL/EAP in Israel. For the detail of the procedure and of the consent form see (Appendix 14).

Another research tool that has been used in order to provide for as full a picture as possible is an anonymous, non-obligatory questionnaire (Appendix 15) that has been distributed among my colleagues- the other EAP lecturers at the English department. Having conducted in-depth interviews with the heads of the department, I felt that it would be difficult, perhaps even inappropriate to address certain aspects of the EAP teaching practice of my peers in a face to face in-depth interview. Indeed, the mode of the in-depth interview can be very intense, perhaps sometimes intimidating and obviously activates the halo- effect. Adams, Fujii and Mackey explain that "(i)n interviewing there is also danger of the so-called halo effect, which refers to interviewees picking up from the researcher cues related to what they think the researcher wants them to say that potentially influence the learner's responses". (Adams, Fujii, & Mackey, 2005, p. 83)

While interviewing co-workers or colleagues from the field who were placed higher on the hierarchical scale the halo-effect did not seem to be so problematic, however, addressing questions relevant to the EAP teaching practice of my immediate peers seemed as previously

mentioned somewhat misplaced and awkward. Therefore, following a professionalization workshop at the department, the anonymous questionnaires were distributed to all the participants and those who were willing to fill in the questionnaires were kindly asked to put it back in my drawer. Five people out of 21 EAP staff members have thoroughly filled the questionnaire in and their comments are a valuable source complementing the information the sources of the research and presenting a rounded-up study.

6. FINDINGS

6.1.Part One

6.1.1. The relationship between prior background SLCH knowledge and the understanding of the main idea of the text

Out of 43 respondents, only 23.3%, that is 10 people, have managed to answer the global question correctly. A strong statistically significant relationship was found between the ability to answer the SLCH questions correctly and the ability to understand the main idea ($X^2_{(9)}=24.277, C=0.751, p=0.004$). Moreover, the distribution table shows that those who knew the correct answer to 6 and more questions have answered the final global reading comprehension question correctly (Table 3). This is in stark contrast to those who answered 5 and less questions correctly. Different texts have different amounts of cultural references, still on the basis of the findings of the research it is possible to extrapolate that knowledge of more than 60% of the SLCH in a given text could be a major factor in the facilitating of global reading comprehension proficiency in English. Moreover, a statistically significant ($X^2_{(5)}=26.765, p=0.004$) Logistic Binary Regression test showed that with every additional correct SLCH question, the probability of getting the main idea right increased by 3.038. The relationship between L1 and global reading comprehension

A strong statistical relationship was found between the L1 and the ability to answer the main idea question correctly ($X^2_{(2)}=12.407, C=0.751, p=0.002$) (Table 4). Furthermore, the distribution chart shows that among L1 Hebrew and L1 other native speakers the number of correct answers to the main idea question were divided into equal parts; 50% of the answers were correct and 50% were irrelevant. In comparison only 4% of the Arabic L1 native speakers answered correctly (Table 5).

6.2.Part Two

Most of the interviewed teacher trainees admitted that they did not experience a sufficient exposure to SLCH content on their training program. However, the truly surprising findings were that most of the respondents felt less concerned with their lack of SLCH knowledge in their future teaching practice, but instead, they felt that the lack of prior background cultural knowledge was particularly problematic as far as their own reading comprehension proficiency in English, especially in the compulsory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) –*Ptor* – exemptions levels -reading comprehension courses was concerned.

6.3.Part three: Quantitative Findings SLCH Experiment

6.3.1. Introducing SLCH Instruction into EAP of EFL Bar-Ilan Learners

The overall number of the students in the SLCH group was 23 with 8 L1 Hebrew speakers and 15 L1 Arabic speakers. The overall number in the control group was 24 with 5 L1 Hebrew speakers and 19 L1 Arabic speakers. Among the students of the SLCH group the percentage of failure was 4.8%, in comparison to the students who studied in the regular type group where the percentage of failure was 28.6%. A statistically significant relationship between pass or fail and the group type has been found ($X^2_{(1)}=4.286$, $\phi=0.319$, $p=0.038<0.05$) (Appendix 21). Furthermore, a comparison between the group type and the average of the final exams has showed a difference of 11.2381 points in favor of SLCH type instruction (Appendix 21).

6.3.2. A significant difference in the averages of the final exams

Moreover, in order to test the difference between the first unseen grade and the final exam grade in both groups a T- test for independent groups was conducted. Thus in the SLCH group a statistically significant difference was found between the grade of the first unseen and the final exam grade ($T_{(20)}=-5.385$, $p=0.000<0.05$) (Appendix 21). The results showed that the average grades of the first unseen among the SLCH group students was $M=41.476$ with $SD=25.955$ while the average of the final course exam was $M=65.8095$, with $SD=17.45170$, thus the gap between the average of the first unseen and the final exam grade was 24.33333 points. In the regular group type, however, no statistically significant difference between the average of the first unseen and the final course grade has been found. So that in the regular type group the gap between the first unseen and the final course exam grade was only 10.04762 points. Thus the comparison between the averages of the initial entry level unseen grades and the final exam grades has shown that the progress in the regular type group was two times

lower than the SLCH type group (SLCH-24.33333 points, Regular-10.04762 points) (Appendix 21) .

6.3.3. Progress of L1 Hebrew speakers SLCH/Regular

The results, however, were particularly interesting when into the previous T-test of comparing the averages of all the unseens, the additional variable of the native tongue (L1) was added. The comparison showed that as far as the L1 Hebrew speakers were concerned in the beginning of the course the SLCH group L1 Hebrew students were weaker (60.7500-SLCH vs. 62.000-Regular). Starting from the second unseen, however, the grades kept increasing in comparison to the regular type group: unseen II (76.2500-SLCH vs. 62.200-Regular), unseen III (83.7500-SLCH vs. 64.800-Regular), unseen IV (77.5000-SLCH vs. 55.4000-Regular) and final exam (82.2857-SLCH vs. 63.333-Regular) (Appendix 22).

Thus there has been a notable progress of 21.5357 points between the average of the initial and the final grades (average of L1 Hebrew speakers SLCH group unseen 1= 60.7500 in comparison to average of L1 Hebrew speakers SLCH group final exam=82.2857). This is in stark contrast to the progress of the regular type group L1 Hebrew speakers with a progress of only 1.333 between the initial and final exam averages (average of L1 Hebrew speakers regular group unseen 1= 62.0000 in comparison to final exam=63.3333) (Appendix 22).

6.3.4. Progress of L1 Arabic speakers SLCH/Regular

As far as the L1 Arabic students were concerned the difference was even starker. On the first unseen the level of the SLCH type group L1 Arabic speakers was significantly weaker (33.800-SLCH vs. 40.3158-Regular) to only improve on the second unseen (53.600-SLCH vs. 40.8947-Regular) to then fall in the third and fourth unseen tests to (46.200 -SLCH vs. 59.0526-Regular) and to (27.4667- SLCH vs. 45.7895- Regular) respectively, to finally leap significantly to (57.5714-SLCH vs. 53.1111-Regular). Thus, the average improvement of the EAP reading comprehension skills of L1 Arabic speakers within the SLCH group was double than the improvement in the regular group type (12.7942 points average progress of regular group in comparison to the 23.7714 points in SLCH group) (Appendix 22).

All grading has been performed independently from the researcher.

6.3.5. Longitudinal re-trial results of the SLCH experiment: An intermediate SLCH EAP group compared to three other control groups

The difference between the average of the final exam grades of the SLCH group and the three other non SLCH intermediate EAP level groups was 7.6 points in favor of the SLCH group (SLCH group Final exam Average grade = 61.8571 (SD=15.28491) in comparison to the Regular group Final exam Average grade = 54.2571 (SD=13.08197)). As it has been mentioned previously, the three other groups have been chosen due to the similarity of their demographic make-over. However as far as the difference in knowledge is concerned a gap of almost 8 points in the final exam grades in comparison to all three groups can be explained by a higher-level of EAP proficiency achieved by the SLCH group. A satisfaction survey administered by the college and entirely independent of the researcher showed that the SLCH experiment course got 4.85 out of 5 (on a scale of 1-5 with five being the highest) - and that in spite of the compulsory nature of the EAP courses. In fact, the motivational factor is extremely problematic in EAP and that is partly due to the compulsory nature of the courses (Appendix 23).

6.4.Part Four

A self-reported feeling of an improved English proficiency

The qualitative findings based on ten semi-structured interviews with the participants of the SLCH experiment featured the subject of motivation as one of the major themes. In general, the issues that the SLCH learners have brought-up were the self-reported feelings of an improved English proficiency, an improved ability of infer and to make logical connections, as well as an improved ability to activate meaning in context and read for the main idea. The relationship between an increase in SLCH knowledge and the ability to understand the purpose of the research and the gap in knowledge were also quoted amongst the improvement factors. The methodological tools that have been perceived as instrumental to the aforementioned improvement in higher order global comprehension skills were the thematic organization of texts as well as the explicit instruction of the SLCH references present in the articles under study. The lack, the partiality or the erroneous nature of SLCH knowledge have been picked up upon as the leading factors hindering reading comprehension proficiency in EAP.

The detrimental effects of the traditional content-form divide

The self- selected group of interviewees have repeatedly reported to strongly regret the traditional EAP content-form divide. According to them, the repetition of the same text-attack

and word-attack skills both at high-school and then at college was linked to the negative image of EAP studies. All the participants have previously experienced a more traditional method EAP course. They tended to strongly favor the SLCH experience that they have had particularly due to the thematic repetition and the building up of general knowledge that they regretted to not having acquired previously. English in general and EAP in particular thus became not only the vehicle of generic text-attack skills but actually the tool for developing real reading comprehension proficiency and the building-up of word and world knowledge.

Moreover, thematic repetition and the gradual build-up of knowledge was credited with greater feeling of perceived fairness, with a substantial increase in the learners' confidence and with the ability "to form one's opinion" and to feel "in the know". Students have self-reported that such feeling have not only increased their general motivation to study EAP but they have also decreased their anxiety towards English as a foreign language. Several students have mentioned a substantial change in their previous mainly negative attitude towards English.

The use of Hebrew as content mediator

The frequent use of the Hebrew language as a content mediator was reported as yet another motivation and confidence generating device. This was true for both Hebrew and Arabic speakers. Moreover, according to the Arabic L1 speakers providing explanations both in Hebrew and in English was instrumental in solving some of the problems generated by the diglossic situation of the Arabic literary and spoken languages as well as by the socio-cultural and economic problems faced by this sector.

(As the corpus of the transcribed, translated and thematically color-coded interviews was so voluminous for the purpose of convenience it has not been attached to this long abstract. Please refer to the actual corpus of the Phd thesis).

References identified as first time discovered during the SLCH experiment

Amongst the terms self-reported as unknown prior to the SLCH course featured the following notions: multiculturalism, mass-transportation, mass-immigration, the Western-World, a nation, globalization, global warming, free trade, government intervention, NGOs, democratization and the industrial revolution, to name but a few.

In line with the principles of academic generalizability and transferability, the qualitative nature of these self-reported attitudes towards the introduction of SLCH content into EAP studies, had to be re-assed on a large scale quantitative level.

6.5.Part five

6.5.1. Large Scale Questionnaire Findings

6.5.1.1. Section One: Type and Frequency of the Terms Identified

The chart below summarizes the terms that have been highlighted by the participants as still unclear, unknown or misunderstood in the context of the excerpt and that - in spite of the use of the electronic dictionary. These results are based on section one question A in the large scale questionnaire.

Table 1: Terms identified as unclear by the students

Word	N	%	Word	N	%	Word	N	%
regimes	42	39.6	democracy	20	18.9	church	9	8.5
Our government has bent Its energies toward	35	33.3	Salient characteristics of the age	19	17.9	secular	9	8.5
agnostics	30	28.6	An oddity	18	17.1	Separation between religious and secular law	8	7.5
agriculture	30	28.3	Authoritarian rule	18	17	phenomenon	6	5.7
homogeneous	28	26.4	industry	17	16.2	ideology	5	4.8
tolerant	27	25.5	constitutions	17	16	government	5	4.8
customarily	25	23.6	Mortal enemies	15	14.3	religious	5	4.7
Sanction of century past	24	22.6	Oldest democracies	15	14.2	National government	3	2.9
genocide	24	22.6	Mass murder	14	13.2	fanatics	3	2.9
oligarchy	22	20.8	consensus	12	11.3	freedom	3	2.8
Resting on popular consent	21	20.2	oppression	10	9.5	votes	2	1.9

6.5.1.2. Section Two: Global Comprehension vs. SLCH Questions

A surprising similarity appeared on the level of the findings relevant to the number of correct answers and the native tongue of the speaker. In order to test the relationship between the native language (L1Hebrew/L1Arabic) and the number of correct answers a Chi- Square test was conducted and a strong statistically significant relationship between the variables was found ($X^2_{(1)} = 19.736$, $\Phi = 0.429$, $p=0.000<0.05$). From the table it is possible to see that among

Hebrew native speakers 73.2% managed to answer correctly to at least five and less questions in comparison to the 100% of incorrect answers among the native Arabic speakers (Table 16).

Moreover, in order to test the relationship between the ability to answer the global comprehension question and the number of the questions answered correctly (five and less questions answered correctly / and six and more questions answered correctly) a Chi- Square test was conducted and a strong statistically significant relationship was found between the variables ($X^2(1) = 16.997$, $\Phi = 0.406$, $p=0.000<0.05$) (Table 17).

The table shows that those who did not manage to identify the purpose of the research correctly- by answering question one in section two- 92.7% also did not manage to get the right answer to six and more questions overall. However, among those who have managed to answer the question relevant to the purpose of the research correctly, 57% have also managed to answer six and more questions (Table 17).

6.5.1.3. Section Three SLCH

This table represents the distribution of the answers for the survey related to the SLCH and the L1.

Table 2: The level of the desire for the integration of SLCH studies

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Would you say that a sentence in English can be correctly understood if the SLCH are unknown or misunderstood: YES / NO	No	82	79.6
	Yes	21	20.4
Would you say that a paragraph in English can be correctly understood if the SLCH are unknown or misunderstood: YES / NO	No	63	61.8
	Yes	39	38.2
Would you say that the main idea of the text or the purpose of the research in an academic article in English can be correctly understood if the SLCH are unknown or misunderstood? YES / NO	No	65	63.1
	Yes	37	36.9
Is it possible to find a satisfactory translation and/or an explanation to the SLCH in the dictionary or in the electronic dictionary? YES / NO	No	86	82.7
	Yes	17	17.3
Do you always understand the connection between certain SLCH and the reason why the author mentions them?	No, I do not always understand	96	93.2
	Yes, I always understand	7	6.8
Please rate the importance of the understanding and the prior background knowledge of the SLCH to the understanding of an academic article in English correctly?	not important	14	13.7
	very important.	88	86.3
	No	68	66.7

		Frequency	Valid Percent
During your EAP studies, have the SLCH received any attention and explanation? Yes/NO	Yes	34	33.3
Would you like them to get more attention and be explained, referred to and discussed in the classroom in all the levels of the EAP program? Do you think that it will improve your understanding of the English language? YES/NO	No	13	12.7
	Yes	89	87.3
Do you think it would help if the SLCH were systematically translated and explained in Hebrew? YES/NO	No	9	9.3
	Yes	88	90.7
Do you think it would help if the SLCH were systematically translated and explained in literary Arabic? YES/NO	No	14	19.4
	Yes	58	80.6

The percentage of the L1 Hebrew participants who said that they indeed thought that systematically explaining and translating the SLCH into Hebrew would help their understanding of the English language and of EAP reading comprehension was 97.3%. Moreover, 86.4% of the L1 Arabic speakers asserted that they feel that a systematic translation and explanation of the SLCH in Hebrew would be beneficial to their understanding of English and their EAP proficiency, only 80.3% of the L1 Arabic speakers admitted that a translation into literary Arabic would be beneficial. This is in stark contrast to the L1 Hebrew speakers 97.3% of whom admit that the use of their native tongue seems to be a primer vehicle for improving their level of SLCH knowledge and that of EAP reading comprehension in English.

6.6.Part six

6.6.1. The Findings of the EAP Lecturer Questionnaires

As mentioned in the research procedure chapter, five out of the 21 EAP faculty members have agreed to fill in questionnaires on their attitudes towards EAP teaching. Mainly, the occurrences identified as pleasant when teaching EAP reflected the instructors concern with the ability of the students to progress and with learners' motivation. The occurrences identified as un pleasant in EAP teaching practiced were relative yet again to learners' motivation, ability to progress and consequently with the levels of the materials and requirements of the course. Most EAP lecturers reported that they were particularly frustrated with the fact that the weaker students were not willing to put in enough effort. The students' low level of general knowledge has also been mentioned as one of the major sources of teacher frustration. The traditional theme of "it is not the EAP instructor's purpose to refer to content" and that they would not be willing to "let it (references and content explanations) override their EAP teaching practice" as well as "there is so much so that we can do" were adjacent to a certain cautious readiness to

integrate references to content. Moreover, some of the lecturers try to remediate to the general knowledge gaps prior to reading an academic article but most of the efforts that have been reported upon are fairly sporadic in their nature. Based on the in-depth interviews with the lecturers and the content analysis of their questionnaires it becomes apparent that EAP instructors would be willing to embrace more content based instruction provided they are supplied with the right methodological tools and materials.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research and consistent with the literature review it is possible to assert that content schema and linguistic schema constantly interact. Our premise is that knowledge of the world and of the linguistic phenomena that it refers to in English cannot and *must* not be separated. Thus, in that sense the traditional emphasis on merely structural and formal instruction in EAP is obsolete and harms to some extent both the EFL EAP learner and the EAP instructor. It has been repeatedly shown that both levels of proficiency as well as the levels of motivation of EAP learners have plummeted when the SLCH experiment tried to bridge the traditional content-form EAP divide. Traditional EAP EFL course-books provide ample exercises for text-attack and word attack skills. They also seem to waste a lot of time by trying to teach higher-order skills such as grasping the main idea or inferencing by simply telling the learners to do so. However, formal instruction of those skills, has been proven to be effective only onto a certain level. These conscious efforts cannot replace the cognitive automaticity processes that help generate a mental picture in the reader's mind provided that the appropriate content and linguistic schema exists in order to accommodate it. Thus, even when repeatedly trained to infer, to recognize reference words or to highlight the connectors of comparison and contrast, if the learner cannot apply those formal textual schema skills onto a mental matrix that makes sense then their repeated instruction is only generating frustration.

Frustration, anger, lack of motivation and sometime even feelings of discrimination are not to be taken lightly in education in general and in foreign language instruction in particular. The relationship between high levels of motivation and educational achievement has been thoroughly documented. Moreover, in order to fill in the gaps between the shared knowledge assumption implied by the author or the researcher and the content linguistic schema of EFL EAP learner, narrow thematic repetition as well as the instruction of the denotational and the connotational aspects of the three SCLH categories established by the research must be introduced into the traditional EAP course -books. Recognizing these terms or explaining them

is not easy. It must be done by qualified professionals such as: philologists or cultural historians. It is advisable to use the native tongue in order to provide for schema content mediation. In the Israeli context it would be advisable to use both Hebrew and literary Arabic, with a clear major preference towards Hebrew even amongst the Arabic L1 speakers. This must be done in addition to consistent and gradual EFL vocabulary enhancement. Since the array of thematical subjects that traditionally appear on the EAP reading comprehension exams often seem to focus on a fairly predictable array of themes, they can therefore be taught under thematic units with vocabulary levels that gradually progress from one level of EAP proficiency to another. Indeed, prior familiarity with a subject in EFL highly improves not only the levels of motivation but also the ability to acquire new content and linguistic schema and thus bridges the Mathew effect. Readers do not have to be familiar with all the SLCH references in a given article, however, comprehension of at least 60 % of the references has been strongly and repeatedly shown to affect global reading comprehension in EFL. Finally, bridging the content-form divide in EFL EAP studies, will also bridge the divide between the recommendations provided by the extensive theoretic research in EFL EAP reading comprehension and its actual grass-root teaching practice.

Moreover, as far as the education of the future generation of EFL teacher trainees is concerned, it is recommended that SCLH awareness and instruction became more systematic and more extensive. In order to avoid stereotypical or anecdotal cultural representations a manual based on historical, cultural and political phenomena of the English speaking world is highly recommended. While such textbooks exist for the purposes of higher-education abroad, no such work currently exists on the Israeli market. It is high-time to make the most of school time both in the EFL teacher training institutions or in EAP EFL instruction in general. This is true both for the heterogeneous, multicultural EFL EAP classes in Israel and abroad. SLCH schema knowledge is not to be taken to granted neither in a language school in London -preparing students to pass their IELTS exam- nor in the north of Israel – preparing students to take their exemption levels in EAP reading comprehension. It is time to stop trying to decide whether an article is difficult “because of the English or because of the general knowledge required”. Instead, both the EAP instructors and the EFL teacher trainees should be provided with professional and specialized materials that do not divorce content from form and that simultaneously build word and world knowledge alongside motivation and interest. As some of the limitations of the research include the fact that this study has been conducted in the north of Israel, it would be highly recommended to open it up and to test its premises both in other

parts of the country and abroad. The creation of EAP materials with clear and easily implementable methodological devices combining both a gradual build-up of content and vocabulary knowledge alongside the enhancement of formal and structural schemata are obviously highly recommended. Fortunately, having been exposed to the results of the research and to the motivational echoes coming from students who have been exposed to the SLCH experiment certain academic colleges in the north of Israel have decided upon implementing some of the content based precepts into their EAP programs.

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