First love letter to conflicting marriages: Exploration of ethnically diverse students' developing understanding during their reading of *Romeo and Juliet* using Schema Theory

Abstract:

This article presents the findings of a linguistic ethnographic pilot study, conducted as part of an ongoing research study, to examine how students utilise their knowledge and experience in understanding literary texts being studied from different cultural and temporal spaces. The analysis of this development in the students' comprehension of new concepts during their learning of *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 2008), was conducted in an inner city, ethnically diverse East Midlands school, and drew on schema theory (e.g. Stockwell, 2002) and conceptual blending (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998). These frameworks were used to track the development of understanding of novel concepts such as love, with the findings demonstrating the students' enriched comprehension by combining concepts they are familiar with to create a new conception. Here, the focus was on how activities conducted in the classroom, such as short writing tasks and classroom discussions, encouraged students to reflect on such combining or merging of concepts which draws on vital relations which provides an alternative way to perceive ideas.

Key words: Schema Theory, Cultural Identity, English Literature, GCSE Curriculum reform

1 Introduction

The recent changes to GCSE English initiated in 2014 comprised of a refocus on canonical literature consisting of works from 'dead white guys' (Robinson, 2001: 69). This shift has constrained the choice of texts available to study; texts depicting a diverse range of voices from present day multicultural society have been overlooked. It can be argued that the omission of these texts is due to an emphasis on the English literary heritage, which may not match the rich array of backgrounds in the present day classroom. Johnstone (2011) refers to his experience of teaching the 'Different Cultures Anthology' (AQA 2002), which consisted of a collection of poetry from around the world. Although he mentions he enjoyed teaching the material, he explains there was a sense of contradiction in how the anthology denied the 'truly multicultural… lives of those who experiences are articulated by such writers' (2011: 128). Johnstone argues that the concept of teaching about 'different cultures' seemed absurd for him, since the poems resonated with the 'multicultural' experiences of the students in his classroom and should not have been considered as exploring the unfamiliar or strange.

The removal of the category of prose or poetry from 'different' cultures and replacing it with heritage texts of Britain, is argued to have "validated and 'legitimised'" Michael Gove's decision over what should be taught (Elliott, 2014: 284). Elliott refers to Gove's speech regarding the importance of 'liberal education' which, in relation to English, expresses the necessity to teach 'the great works of the canon' containing 'eternal truths about human nature…impossible to encounter elsewhere' (Gove, 2011). As Gove explains:

'whether its Austen's understanding of personal morality, Dickens' righteous indignation, Hardy's stern pagan virtue, all of these authors have something rich to teach us which no other experience, other than intimate connection with their novels, can possibly match'

(Gove, 2011)

Here, the focus on British texts advocating 'morality', 'righteous[ness]' and 'virtue', is what Gove suggests that 'no other experience', including texts, from other cultures, can provide (Elliott 2014: 284). Elliott (2014: 284) cites the lack of acknowledgement of multicultural texts in their exclusion from the National Curriculum in favour of the texts referred to above by Gove. Here, Gove's framing of English Literature presents moral values as a property of the subject, which should be instilled through the medium of teaching purely canonical literature to the students. However this view potentially limits not only students engaging with the representation of other societies and cultures and their experiences but also could prevent them from drawing on their own cultural knowledge as they read literary texts.

This article demonstrates the ways that a teacher and students jointly draw on knowledge they hold when studying concepts in the classroom. As will be further discussed in section 4, the students' active constructions and development of schemas was based on classroom talk being a reciprocal process of knowing, rather than a transference of knowledge from teacher to student. Rather than the students being told to believe what was taught as 'experience' in the form of the literary texts, the pilot study demonstrates how the students come to question, challenge,

deconstruct and reconstruct this form of reality in relation to their own experiences and knowledge of the real world.

By suggesting that multicultural texts do not offer as valuable lessons as the 'canon', Elliott echoes Johnstone's view of the boundary formed by such assumptions about literature hailing from other cultures. Johnstone explains this boundary has been made as a result of the importance placed on texts as those referred to by Gove, in comparison to literature hailing from other cultures, which has not been recognised in a similar manner. This is because Johnstone discusses the perception surrounding multicultural literature as presenting an unfamiliar aspect of the world, which needs to be explored as the other, or in other words, different from what we know and understand about the world (2011: 126), should change. The use of the term in the anthology's title 'different' depicts not only the poems, but also those whose experiences have been represented as distinct, linking to Johnstone's argument as discussed above for the removal of the rigid boundary present between the English tradition of teaching Western texts, and works from different cultures (2011: 126). Johnstone's comment reflects a notion proposed by Said, 'orientalism', which explained how the West formed and associated stereotypical characteristics with the people and culture originating from Asia (1994: 148). By associating these characteristics with the region and its citizens, this resulted in these people being considered as different according to the West's understanding of these habitats (1994: 148). He further explains the West's knowledge of the East resulted in the '*geographical space* of the Orient' to be 'penetrated, worked over, taken hold of' (Said, 1994: 148). Here, Said's reference to how the representation of the East has been altered according to the West's perception of this unfamiliar territory, relates to Johnstone's concern about how the poems from various 'cultures' are depicted and

perceived in a British classroom as strange and treated as different. However, with the recent developments in the GCSE English Literature curriculum, this intention of speaking to the students' 'experiences' could be argued to have been disregarded altogether. In this article I focus on how the study of literature should involve an interaction with students, sharing their interpretations through classroom activities and discussions initiated by the class teacher.

This article examines students' development in understanding in the literature classroom. I draw on schema theory (e.g. Stockwell, 2002) to trace how this develops during the students' reading and exploration of literary texts. Schema theory acknowledges individuals have generic knowledge about how the real world works which is 'culturally and temporally specific' (Emmott and Alexander, 2014: 756). Individuals are able to utilise knowledge, including memories, past events and feelings, as a resource to understand the subject in focus during discussions. Using these mental resources, including knowledge and experiences in the real world, individuals are able to share their understanding of language events through conversations with others. This study aims to discover how students use these individual resources and understandings, that are 'culturally and temporally specific', to negotiate their comprehension of the text being studied. In this instance, I examine how the students make meaning of the culturally, socially and temporally distinct scenarios presented in *Romeo and Juliet*. I therefore explore how literary texts affect students' developing understanding of abstract concepts such as love and arranged marriages, and how they manage their way to understanding such concepts through the medium of conversation.

2. The current state of English Literature in the classroom: Arguing for a multicultural English subject

Neelands discusses the relationship between culture and English as a subject (2008), and further explains that prominent literary figures such as Shakespeare, should not be considered iconic by being part of the 'white English canon' (2008: 13). Instead students should be encouraged to relate to these texts by finding commonality with the shared experiences depicted. Here, Neeland's reference to a 'common resource' (2008: 13) focuses on the students' contributions to the study of literature in the form of connecting their personal experience and understanding with the narrative or concepts presented, to explain how the text is meaningful to them.

Neelands' work in relation to another study (see Shah, 2013 below), provides an insight into how such connections are made when ethnically diverse students discuss social issues prevalent in their communities in relation to their study of texts. For example, issues such as duty and honesty were highlighted by the students and demonstrated that their interaction with the characters was by associating with the latter's realities represented in the text (2008: 13). The present study also puts emphasis on student voice and understanding, by exploring the process of the students' comprehension of *Romeo and Juliet*. The exploration involves focusing on how the class teacher facilitates the students' understandings by encouraging them to think about concepts with alternative perspectives, in the form of activities completed, such as short writing tasks and whole class discussions. For instance, Analysis 2: Conflicting Marriages below demonstrates how the teacher prompted the students to explore the differing and, to some extent, conflicting understandings they

had of arranged marriages. By acknowledging these differences in understanding during the class feedback, the students were able to expand their knowledge on this particular concept discussed. This was by recognising the alternative ways of thinking about this cultural practice, from being considered a forceful decision put on individuals to liberating since individual consent is necessary.

The present English classroom includes students from diverse backgrounds, which plays a part in their developing understanding of texts. Shah (2013) provides similar findings to Neeland's, focusing on the teaching of the *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, to an ethnically diverse Year 8 group. Shah explores 'what does it mean when students impose their own cultural histories upon texts that originate in very different times and cultures?' (2013: 195), and provides instances documenting the challenging yet intriguing process where students formed their own interpretations based on cultural links they made with the text. Shah explains an instance when a female student of Somali heritage drew parallels between her perspectives of being female in her cultural environment, which features a patriarchal structure, and the suppression of Hester in the novel (2013: 198). Here, Shah's example provides a glimpse into the complex process of comprehension, consisting of the students developing a sense of affiliation, empathy and awareness of the role of women in the text, and the connection between the text and the society in which the students reside.

2.1 Exploring Identity and Culture

When considering the classroom and what identity stands for in this particular interactive environment, Clark's definition of national culture is relevant in

understanding the notion of 'cultural hybrids' (2013: 50). Here, Clark states although the national culture into which individuals are born becomes the main 'cultural identity', this aspect of an individual's identity becomes moulded along with the 'local and particular identities, communities and organisations' which occur 'through new spatial and temporal relationships' (2013:50). This amalgamation happens through the interaction between these different aspects of individuals' identities. The present study focuses on the interrelationship between these elements of an identity, to explore how individuals negotiate between these 'identities' and 'communities' in order to gain an understanding of the topics being discussed, such as love and arranged marriages in this article's case. Hall and Du Gay (1996) discuss this process of negotiation when stating identity is constructed through characteristics which are shared between individuals belonging to these 'particular identities' and 'organisations', forming a sense of 'solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation' (1996: 20). Here, this construction of an individual's identity is continuous, with this 'foundation' shifting constantly due to changes in the social, political and economic frames (Hall and Du Gay, 1996: 3).

Although the notion of identity is influenced and constructed by the external factors mentioned above, individuals do still have a sense of 'agency' (Eagleton, 2016: 27) which enables them to decide how they construct their association with their evolving cultural identity. Individuals are able to build their identity through mutual beliefs, values and perspectives taken on and shared as they move between different communities during their lives. In regard to this present study, the emphasis is on how students enact their cultural identities during discussions in an ethnically diverse setting, with culture being considered as a significant factor in how they comprehend the text being studied.

In a classroom where there is an array of cultural backgrounds determining the diverse perspectives of the students, culture provides individuals with the opportunity to shape distinct identities. Eagleton explains culture can be considered not only as a 'medium of power' but also a 'mode of resistance' (2016: 80), which suggests identities are in contention to be accepted by others who live in the same environment as the individuals. When considering a classroom environment, Eagleton's comment reflects the challenges facing students to voice their 'resistance' to the accepted understanding or interpretation of a text, as they share their positioning within the real world and the certain cultural beliefs, values and perspectives they have with others through conversations. The students should be given the authority over their personal and individual perspectives coloured by their sense of 'reality' (Clark, 2013: 12), and the 'power' to share their viewpoints during interactions. Clark's reference to individuals having this authority to depict their perspective through language, resonates with Eagleton's point regarding how individuals obtain 'agency', enabling them to provide alternative viewpoints and explore these during classroom discussions. However, the mode of 'resistance' should not be considered as confrontational, but an opportunity for students to share, acknowledge and expand their understanding of alternative viewpoints, as cited above regarding arranged marriages, which others hold.

2.2 Schema Theory: Understanding individuals' Knowledges

Emmott explains that narratives require readers to have 'general knowledge' which includes understanding 'a particular culture, common situations…and social relations' which create the text world being depicted (1997: 4). This 'knowledge' is what enables readers to make sense of the text. A 'schema' or set of 'schemata' is the store of information individuals have in their minds, and from which they retrieve

relevant information in order to support them in the comprehension of certain events or situations represented (Emmott, 1997: 23). Using personal experiences and knowledge to understand how the world operates, individuals are able to form their own interpretation and perspective of the situations represented. When discussing the significance of 'general knowledge', Minsky explains that this process of understanding begins from the word level, as he states individuals start making sense of the words and use 'vital knowledge about how different things are related' (1975: 26). This process of relating words through the use of 'knowledge' about how concepts and notions are formed through verbal expression, supports the idea of individuals building their own interpretations by making connections between words and thinking processes. Relation is the central focus of this study, and the students' input in the form of discussions provides a glimpse of how they are understanding particular themes explored when studying *Romeo and Juliet*.

Emmott explains readers are required to use 'knowledge' to guide them through their 'interpretation of each sentence' (1997: 177). The process comprises of fragments of these elements being foregrounded, such as memories and emotions, which are then used to develop an understanding through interactions. By sharing these elements through conversations, participants are able to construct a 'mental representation' (Emmott, 1997: 177) enabling them to form their own understanding of the topic being discussed. These 'schemas' refer to a collection of knowledge including objects, situations and settings relevant to a specific topic (Minsky, 1975; Emmott and Alexander, 2014: 411). For instance, when discussing the classroom 'frame', one is aware this refers to a specific setting, and certain objects such as table and chairs which make up a typical understanding of this particular 'frame'. In this study I draw on this notion to examine how students develop an understanding

of unfamiliar concepts during their reading. For instance, the analysis of the examples in section 4 further explore how students form connections between their understanding of the abstract concept of love, and their experience of this particular idea in the real world, to comprehend the situation depicted in the text.

3. Methodology: Adopting a Linguistic Ethnographic approach

Linguistic Ethnography is a methodology that allows the researcher to gain an insight into how social contexts influence individuals' perspectives on actions and how language acts as a medium in conveying these perceptions through language (Creese and Copland, 2015: 13). This focus reflects the interpretivist approach which acknowledges that language 'can be used to explicate' individuals' 'experiences' (Denzin, 1989: 46). Here, the 'experiences' are foregrounded through, as Denzin explains, the '[…]"how" question[…]how is social experience, or a sequence of social interaction… perceived, and constructed by interacting individuals?' (1989: 44). The significance of 'interacting individual[s]' is reflected through the ethnographical method chosen focusing on the 'emic perspective', a method revolving around familiarising with the group being observed and providing a perspective from within the group. For the purpose of this study I, the researcher, was present in the classroom to provide an inside perspective, as well as formulate an understanding of how the students manage the following three types of interactions between:

- Students and the class teacher about the text and related concepts and themes explored;

- Students and the class (as a whole and small groups) about the text and related concepts explored;

- Students and the text being studied.

An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to explore interactions present in the social world and in this instance, comprehend how the students and teacher negotiate through the 'chaotic' and 'contradictory' accounts which are shared during these interactions (Blommaert, 2007: 682). The 'chaotic' aspect to the interactions refers to the individuals' differing 'experience[s]' prompting a sharing of conflicting perspectives. Blommaert further explains ethnography focuses on the layering of individuals' perspectives unveiled as the interaction develops and 'constructed', as Denzin describes, by the individuals' attempts to bring the collation of ideas and viewpoints together. In this study, the focus is on the students' joint construction by negotiating the differing 'experiences', in the form of knowledge, comprehension and feelings amalgamated during their conversations to understand novel concepts.

3.1 Selecting Schools

The aim of conducting a study is to gain an understanding of the social context in which the observations would occur (Creese and Copland, 2015: 69). In the initial stage of arranging the study, I maintained this focus when contacting schools selected based on the ratio of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Situated in the East Midlands region, the selected inner city school consists of students originating from an array of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, which provided invaluable insight into the rich and diverse experiences in a classroom setting. Figure 1 below presents an overview of the different ethnicities students originate from in the school. A Year 8 teacher confirmed interest in participating in

the study, therefore I was allocated with her middle-set group. The class consisted of six different nationalities as presented below in Figure 2, which demonstrates the richness in experiences, knowledge and understandings present in a single classroom. This diversity in experience and knowledge produced insightful, effective and perceptive discussions between the students and teacher, as shall be discussed in section 4.

Figure 1: Overview of students' ethnic background in the school (locate on top of page 13)

Figure 2. Overview of students' ethnic background in Year 8 English class (locate on bottom of page 13)

When discussing the aim of the study, I explained that it would enable me to gain insight into how the class teacher provided opportunities for students to develop their understanding of the reading of the selected text, *Romeo and Juliet*, in the form of classroom activities during the lessons. The data collated through field notes focused on the class teacher's attempts to provide this opportunity to share perspectives, such as through classroom discussions on the readings. These interactions enabled me to focus on the development of understanding, and focus on two examples consisting of insight into the shared ideas discussed in section 4 below.

The teacher's role in how she coped with the differing perspectives was particularly important in determining the way the students responded to the tasks. This is because when completing the field notes on the observations, the significance of this medium of recording events is to 'look' in order to observe and interpret (Emerson and Fretz, 1995: 23). Here, the discussions between the class teacher and I consisted of talking and reflecting on the findings noted, and our perspectives on the particular instances selected. Here, the discussions succeeding the observations resonate the essence of linguistic ethnography because, according to Hammersley, the method is about studying 'a site of encounter' (2007: 689). The 'encounter' in the case of this study's focus, is the students' interactions and how the teacher facilitates the former's developing understanding of abstract concepts.

4 Analysis: Focus on the Interaction

The following discussion refers to two 'encounters' where the students negotiate through a conflict of understandings about topics discussed, in this case love and arranged marriage. These negotiations occur during interactions which can be

considered a 'dynamic' process, where 'schemas' accessed by individuals to understand such notions are continuously 'altered in the course of experience' (Emmott and Alexander, 2014: 412). By focusing on the discussions between individuals, I explore the 'dynamic' nature of this form of communication by studying how the students develop their understanding in conjunction with the new information shared. Similarly, Emmott explains how such development of knowledge results in individuals interpreting the 'sentences' along with this information. Here, the two examples demonstrate this 'dynamic' process by exemplifying how the students and teacher managed their differing knowledge in the classroom, to understand unfamiliar concepts presented during the lessons.

4.1 Analysis 1: First Love Letter

The first instance which will be discussed exemplifies the students' developing understanding of abstract concept of love introduced by the teacher. During the main activity, the class were asked by the teacher to write a love letter as Romeo to Rosaline, his first love interest in Act 1 Scene 3. As the students began working on this activity, I walked around and asked students how they were finding the task, and a female student of Pakistani origin said she was finding writing a love letter difficult. When asked the reason behind finding the task difficult, the student mentioned she didn't know about love. The student's response suggested this writing task was a novel experience for her, and cited a difference based on experience between her and the class teacher's understanding about the abstract concept of love. Further explanation was required for students to understand this novel concept, and the nature of the abstract notion of love represented in the play. In this instance, the

student did not possess the schema of knowledge about love to understand the kind of love presented by Shakespeare, due to her not having the experiential knowledge regarding this particular experience in the real world.

During my discussion with the class teacher regarding this particular instance post lesson, she explained the students' inexperience of love would be addressed by relating their understanding of love in other aspects of their lives, such as family, sports and food, with the type of romantic love depicted in the text. This relation between understandings would be through the creation of analogies which were then used to form similes, combining the students' experience of love as a concept with Romeo and Rosaline's depicted love. Here, the development of the students' schema was based on the expansion of their knowledge of the real world. The nature of the activity involved students to write a simile based on love, with the ten minute task prompting students to consider the relationship between entities, as depicted in the play.

By providing the students with a sentence structure 'Love is like…because…' the students were able to form relations between entities, involving them to understand the similarities between entities to construct a meaningful comparison. Looking at this activity at a linguistic level, a comparison involves the merging of two spaces, resulting in relationships developing across the 'mental spaces' to create a new space, considered a blend (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998: 133). Mapping across mental spaces is termed as conceptual blending by Fauconnier and Turner, who explain such developments in understanding concepts, can be described as 'dynamic, supple, and active in the moment of thinking' (1998: 133).

'Mental spaces' are selections of knowledges and experiences drawn on to think and talk about the subjects or topics in discussion, consisting of ideas

understood about how the real world operates. Stockwell explains these 'mental spaces' are constantly developing, therefore involve 'cognitive tracking' to understand the evolving comprehension of 'entities, relations and processes' (2002: 96) which individuals face through interactions. However, when faced with a novel concept such as love, these 'mental spaces' are involved in overlapping the qualities of two schemas to create a blend of a number of concepts shared by these schemas, into a new notion. The 'thinking' process is considered 'dynamic' because it involves the mapping between two 'mental spaces' based on common 'relationships across the spaces' and features, known as inputs, which form the 'generic space' (Stockwell, 2002: 97). From the generic space, 'specific features' that have shared relationships and features create a new concept or space, called a 'blend' (Stockwell, 2002: 97). The examples demonstrating the students' understanding of love are discussed below drawing on the concept of blending to demonstrate how the students' developed their understanding of the abstract notion. In doing so I highlight the mapping across two mental spaces that marks the creation of the analogies.

To exemplify Fauconnier and Turner's point, the sentence below was created and shared by the student during the class feedback. Here, the sentence demonstrates the 'dynamic' nature of the student developing her understanding of the abstract concept of love. Figure 3 shows the 'cognitive tracking' of the student's gradual understanding of the notion, as the new blended space demonstrates her perception of love in an alternative manner. Here, by associating love with a concrete entity (e.g. diamond), the student demonstrates an understanding of how the two entities are similar in terms of qualities. This association forms a relationship

between the two spaces (Input 1 and 2: Diamond and Love) by linking their qualities to create a new blended space (in this case, a simile).

Figure 3. Schema diagram for sentence 'Love is like a diamond because you treasure it'

In regard to Figure 3, the comparison of 'Love is like a diamond' foregrounds the characteristics which revolve around the notion of value. For instance, in Input 1: Diamond, the entity is considered as:

- precious therefore is given to someone who is special for another individual
- hard in texture
- worthy of attention.

This understanding resonates with the comparison made between Input 1: Diamond and Input 2: Love, where the idea of value can be measured by:

- the special nature of a relationship for an individual
- its strong bond that it becomes unbreakable

- a relationship requiring constant attention to sustain it.

Such comparisons demonstrate the similarities which emerge from creating the simile, offering an insight into how the student has built her understanding of the abstract concept.

4.2 Analysis 1a: Commonalities between distinct mental spaces

Another example which raised an interesting viewpoint regarding the effect of culture on an individual's identity is presented in Figure 4. This particular student's example shows a comparison of an abstract concept with another concrete entity, such as the food item samosa. The example reflects the 'relationship between the individual and the world' (Gibbs, 2000: 352), because the differing levels of experience in the classroom is not only due to age but also cultural factor. This is because those originating from particular environments (e.g. South Asian or Middle Eastern) tend not to discuss topics like love and relationships publicly. In the student's case, the sentence demonstrates a 'cultural…transmission' (Freeman, 2006: 107) as well as development in acknowledging her 'embodied experience' (see Freeman, 2006: 113) of eating her favourite food, in the form of the evaluative adjective 'nice' describing her sensory perception. By describing her senses, the student's example forms a connection to understand the impact of the abstract concept 'love' in an internal, emotional way. As Figure 4 presents, the student explained when asked about the connection between the two entities how love can provide companionship, just like food can be considered as comfort for individuals needing a sense of contentment.

In Figure 4 Input 1, the object is referring to someone who is feeling hungry or an individual who likes this particular food item, which the input entity is referring to. Regarding the 'love' input, this abstract concept is referring to someone who needs

companionship therefore this particular individual becomes the intended object. When referring to the input entity's goal or purpose, this refers to its relationship in a particular space. For instance, if an individual is eating samosas, the main purpose of this action is to alleviate the hunger which requires food; likewise, the input entity, love, aims to alleviate an individual's sense of loneliness and offer companionship. Here, these commonalities between the two entities are presented in the generic space, where these amalgamated qualities or properties become one to show connections between these two distinct mental spaces. Figure 4 demonstrates Gibbs' comment regarding focusing on the 'relationship' between the individual and his/her environment. When considering the input entity's purpose, the mental construct of the intertwined experiences involving the concept love and the food item samosa, reflects the duality of this 'relationship' where to understand the sentence created, an individual should explore the spaces using their knowledge and experience to understand this connection between the entities. During the whole class feedback, the students shared their similes which the teacher wrote out on the board and summarised the purpose of love based on the examples provided. For instance, she mentioned the example 'love is like a diamond because you treasure it' suggests love is about treating an individual in a special and kind way, which the students began to gradually understand over the course of the scheme of learning.

Figure 4. Schema Diagram for Sentence: Love is like a samosa because it is nice

4.3 Analysis 2: Conflicting Marriages

Freeman's reference to the 'cultural…transmission' is applicable when considering
the next scenario during a classroom discussion. However, the issue which rose
from this particular discussion shows a conflict between the students' different
perspectives on a cultural practice. This particular scenario occurred during the class
reading of Act 3 Scene 5, when Lord Capulet is arranging Juliet's marriage with
Paris. For this scene, the class were asked to answer the question 'What problems
are there with arranged marriages?'. After this ten minute task at the beginning of the
lesson, the student were told to then provide feedback during a class discussion.
Some students shared the following issues they thought related to the idea of
arranged marriages:

- Individuals may not like each other
- An individual may be after another's money
- Someone may be forcing others to get married
- Either individual doesn't agree
- Parents have to choose for their children
- Individuals may suffer in the relationship
- An individual can hurt another

During the sharing of the issues mentioned above, the class' responses were met by
a student's rhetorical question:

but they are arranged?

Here, the student's interrogative suggests a sense of conflict between his and the class' perception of arranged marriage, prompting the discussion to expand during the feedback, in order to accommodate the alternative perspectives shared.

The notion of expanding a schema through the development of information is what Stockwell defines as 'schematic accretion', one of three processes which explains how individuals build their knowledge (2002: 79). By holding a discussion where the ideas are made public, Stockwell comments the changes to 'knowledge structures' occur due to the 'dynamic and experientially developing' nature of this sharing of information (2002: 79). The sharing process enables individuals to understand and broaden the concept being discussed. In regard to the student's response to the feedback, this raises the question of how individuals should respond when they are potentially challenging the dominant understanding shared by others. Returning to the example above, the student's question raises issues surrounding the definition of the term 'arranged marriage'. The male student hailed from a British Pakistani background, where arrange marriages are a common practice, and tend to be different from a forced marriage since the former involves the consent of both individuals involved. The issue revolves around the term's affiliation with the concept of a 'forced marriage' implied in the text since Juliet's viewpoint is not approved by Lord and Lady Capulet. The integral notion of 'arranged marriage' involving the agreement of the individuals involved is being challenged by the text and other students, by sharing their understanding that such marriages are forced upon individuals and that they have no say since others decide for the individuals.

During the classroom discussion, the student's interrogative prompts an alternative perspective to be considered to show his attempt in sharing his 'own cultural histor[y]' to comprehend the conflicting definitions being discussed. Shah's comment regarding her students' taking control over their interpretations links with the student's response providing an insight into his developing 'schema', which is not only prompting an expansion of his own understanding of arranged marriage but also of the rest of the class. This is because the contrasting conjunction 'but' prompts the other students to consider this alternative version of the notion of 'arranged marriage' presented by the student. The question suggests a sense of challenge against the widely accepted understanding that this is a forceful decision placed on Juliet by Lord Capulet. However, the question can also be considered as an attempt to clarify and expand the student's understanding of the different perceptions of arranged marriage. This can relate to Clark's earlier comment regarding how individuals' identities mould the main 'cultural identity' and the individual's own 'local and particular identities' across time and space (2013: 50).

The alternative perspective suggested is further reinforced by the copula verb 'are', depicting a sense of certainty and confidence in his understanding. However, the nature in which the student phrases his response as an interrogative, suggests he is aware of posing a different interpretation which challenges the notion of 'manufactured reading' in the classroom (Giovanelli and Mason, 2015: 46). Giovanelli and Mason further explain this particular reading involves students considered as 'first-time readers' being guided, and influenced to an extent, by 're-readers' and are 'denied the space to engage in their own process of interpretation' (2015: 46 and 42). Although the student does pose a challenge by sharing his alternative viewpoint and prompting the class to 'engage' and reflect on his

interpretation, the discussion continued with the class teacher explaining and clarifying that the type of arranged marriage being depicted in the play involves Juliet's view not being considered. Here, the teacher moved on from the feedback as the students began to correct the student saying arranged marriage doesn't involve individual consent. The teacher shared an anecdote where she provided an example of an arranged marriage which involved listening to the decision of the individual involved. This example acknowledged the alternative understanding of this type of marriage which the student introduced during the feedback.

There is a conflict between the use of the term 'arranged marriage' in the play, which is demonstrating a forced bond being made by Lord Capulet, contrasting with the student's understanding of this particular practice in the real world. This conflict between what is depicted in the text and understood in the real world is discussed by Quarshie, when suggesting this sense of 'tension' is significant in encouraging the students to explore the collision between the 'common culture' and the 'students' cultures' (2007: 20). Encouragement is promoted through talk and students confronting this 'tension' by offering, defending as well as justifying their interpretations which makes this process enrichening. The enrichment occurs when entering such discussions in attempting to balance the 'tension' created by conflicting viewpoints, which results in the enhancing and deepening of students' understandings through the 'accretion' process discussed above. Students are able to widen their understanding by building on their knowledge due to these differing 'conceptual content' (Stockwell, 2002: 79), enabling them to learn through differences with the possibility of not agreeing on a single interpretation. The student's cultural understanding of arranged marriage is changing along with the exposure to the alternative viewpoints of his peers, which supports Hall and Du

Gay's comment regarding the 'foundation' of his identity 'shifting' (1996: 3), with these different perspectives being introduced through talk. Here, the student's understanding of arranged marriages has widened to acknowledge, even if he may not have accepted, the viewpoints shared.

5. Conclusion

In light of the findings discussed above, the students' developing 'schemas' became more enriched during the process of discussion and reflecting on this expansion of knowledge and understanding. However, external factors, such as social, cultural and economic factors, influence the individuals' understandings of the social world. This is because as the examples above demonstrate, the students' understandings originated from their experience in the social world which were disclosed in the classroom through the discussions surrounding unfamiliar concepts, such as love and arranged marriages. Here, the process of understanding can be considered as a jigsaw, with this metaphor highlighting the challenging route in attempting to align the different, unique and sometimes conflicting concepts and interpretations together. The process involves working with the text and particularly as this study demonstrates, exploring how the language plays an integral role in guiding the students to understand how 'different things are related'. However, further questions arise in relation to how students from different ethnic backgrounds would respond to the scenarios mentioned above. For instance, it would be interesting to examine how students from a white British background would respond to the themes explored, such as arranged marriages and the concept of love, and the cultural influences over their understanding and discussion of such topics. This is because students' experiences manifest their understanding of literature studied, and it would be

beneficial to explore how students from different cultural backgrounds learn through difference, either across ethnicity, race, time or space.

Conversely, in the classroom where such rich and diverse experiences, knowledges and identities exist, it is crucial to understand that in reference to the second findings regarding 'arranged marriages', there cannot be a simple solution by mutually agreeing on a single concept. The 'tension' as Quarshie (2007: 20) refers to, involves exploring conflicting arguments which prompt students to negotiate the shifting 'foundations' of their identities due to the challenging viewpoints contesting the values, beliefs and views they hold, therefore presenting their identities as fluid and constantly changing over time. In light of the recent curriculum reform regarding the shift of focus from texts from different cultures to the literary heritage, this study provides an insight to how the teacher and class negotiate the latter's understanding of new abstract concepts, such as love. The findings show how these complex processes occur through the medium of conversation, which brings to the fore more questions and alternatives rather than aim to problem solve, and acknowledge the alternative perspectives shared. Here, the development of the students' schemas through talk and responses to the writing activity, demonstrated how they managed the challenges brought about due to the changes in the subject, such as the shift in focus on English canonical literature, by finding 'relevance' with aspects of the experience depicted in the texts.

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Furzeen Ahmed is a doctoral researcher at Aston University. The pilot study was conducted as part of her ongoing PhD research based on the exploration of ethnically diverse students' construction of identities during their reading of Literature at Key Stage 4 using Text World Theory.

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