



## COMPLICATIONS IN READING ABRIDGED TEXTS: A STUDY ON CULTURAL DESTRUCTION BY ELLs IN MEANING- MAKING PROCESS

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### ABSTRACT :

Abridged texts for English Language Learners help to improve the power of comprehension. Simplification of texts for ELLs revolves around application of less challenging words and syntax. While interpreting text by eliminating cultural and social interrelated information gives a broad scope of different interpretations and misunderstanding of cultural and social issues. This paper studies the abridged texts designed for ELLs through Readers Response Criticism. The qualitative reader understands that the process of making-meaning from a text depends on the interplay of factors related to the reader, the text, the social context and the cultural influences. The reader combines his intellectual and emotional meanings towards usage of symbols, images and other verbal things. For this purpose a short story 'Father's Help' by RK Narayan's "Malgudi Days" is taken for study. Group Discussion and comparative analysis of the text is analyzed cultural complications arise out of reading abridged text in interpreting and understanding the text by ELLs.

**KEYWORDS :** abridged, complications, cultural interpretations, understanding.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to improve the reading abilities and enhancing comprehension skills among the English Language Learners, the Curriculum designs a few abridged versions of popular texts. When certain abridged texts are prescribed for the ELLs at various stages of their study, the publisher modifies the text according to the needs of the educational material. As per the suggestions of the editorial board members who are expert in the area, the publisher tries to adjust the length of the text by reducing word count. While doing the editing and simplifying the text, certain essential elements of the original text related to the cultural and social aspects are altered, changed or deleted. Sometimes original texts are totally modified the genre, technique and style of the base text which confused the reader whether Shakespeare is dramatist or essayist. Quantitative elements of text like word count, frequency, sentence length, text cohesion and others are scaled through different editing objects. Text structure, clarity in expression through proper language, word and its meaning of qualitative elements are highly challenging and risky to modify and simplify. In spite of various measures taken for protecting the base text meaning and context, there are certain missing elements like social and cultural aspect which mislead the reader to misunderstand the text. So far a few explorations by Liebling C R's "Theory into Practice" (1989), Claridge G's "Reading in a Foreign Language" (2012), Rimmon-Kenan S's "Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics" (2002) and a host of other attempted to find meaning-making process of ELL's who read modified texts that erase or modify the cultural and social information imbibed in the text. But the present study aimed to focus this gap basing on Readers Response Research by analyzing how a select group students of +2 and Technical Graduate students examined for this study responded to the original text of R K Narayan Short story 'Father's help'. The main objective of the

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study is to compare and analyse the meaning-making process of the select groups that read the original and abridged text with edited cultural and social elements.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When the reader focuses on the text, he pays attention to the word and its meaning. The objective of his reading is to understand the theme and content of the given story and interpret them with readers' perspective. The simplification of texts aimed at improving readability. If the focus is on the attention of the reader rather than signs of the language, there is a possibility of losing socio, cultural contexts of the texts. Goodman and Green, Olsen and a few linguists made their experiments on the readability and understanding skills of the ELLs at lower levels and how they interpret the text by destroying the style and diction of the original text. The present study throws light on how meaning-making process in the abridged texts destroys the cultural elements of the text.

### MEANING-MAKING- FROM MODIFIED TEXTS

It is quite natural to compromise on various elements while making a base text to a modified one. The situation, atmosphere and context of the original text is intensified by the intention of the writer proposed through different images and long elaborated similes. It is understood through the reading of the modified versions of various texts that the interpersonal and psychological conflicts of the characters and situations elevated through cultural and social descriptions are lost in text adaptation. Bruce (1984) in his research on school children found;

"Adopted texts seemed to focus more on presenting events than on developing characterization and motivation. Sentences not affecting action tended to be deleted, so some texts were reduced to an unrelated sequence of events" (1984:184)

A study on the short of RK Narayan by the students of +2 and Technical Graduates in this study reveals that the abridged version of the story deleted many cultural and social issues which students cannot find in it. It also resulted in the failure in understanding the interpersonal conflicts and character goals. Finally it concludes that the removed elements in the base story are key to understand the objective of the character and the nature of the situation. By deleting these two, the budding reader of the story gives only the Skelton of the story but not the original context and intention of the story. If a story is about a situation, a reader never comes across such a situation, he may face difficulty in making-meaning and construction of inferences from the abridged text where significant and delicate signs are deleted.

### METHODOLOGY

The readers' response is collected from six members of six Intermediate groups in various Private and Government Junior colleges in Guntur Dist of AP and their response to the short story of abridge version and base version. This is a study made on the +2 and Technical Graduate students in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. The method describes the participants, the text used for the study, data collection procedures and data analysis.

The selection of the students is made randomly three boys and three girls of a college and total of 36 as one group as abridge text readers. Group two consists of the same selection and count reading the original text.

### The Text

The Text given for the study in this paper is "*Father's Help*" written by R K Narayan which tells about the theme of honest, pity, aggression, imagination, guilt, stubbornness and fear. It is taken from his "*Malgudi Days*" collection of stories. The story runs in third person singular with an unnamed narrator. After reading the story, the reader realizes the theme of pity. Swamy, a school boy, rejects to go to school on the day. Mother finds the reason that he feels headache. But father denies it wants the boy to go to school. The boy

complains to father about the master Samuel who punishes the boys very cruelly. But the boys inner conscience says what he said to his father dishonestly about Samuel is wrong. The story moves different ways and covers all the bad qualities of the boy and how his father corrected him.

### Procedure

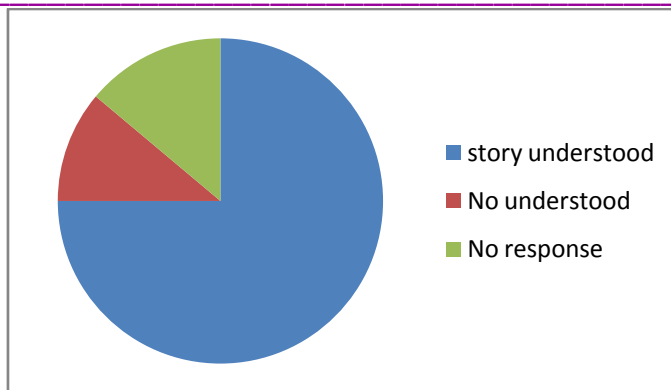
Questions for the students;

- General Purpose: Did you like the story?  
What did you like about it?  
What did you dislike about it?
- Character: Did you like / dislike Swamy?  
What did you like/dislike about him?  
Do you know anyone like Swamy in your friends?
- Situation: Which part of the story did you like? Dislike?  
Why?
- Cultural aspects: Did you come across any local words in English?  
If so, what are they?  
What did you understand about the school atmosphere of those days?  
How a mother reaction to her child?  
What was father's reaction to Swamy? What did you understand with it?
- Variety: Did you come across this kind of story before?  
What type of story you think this is?

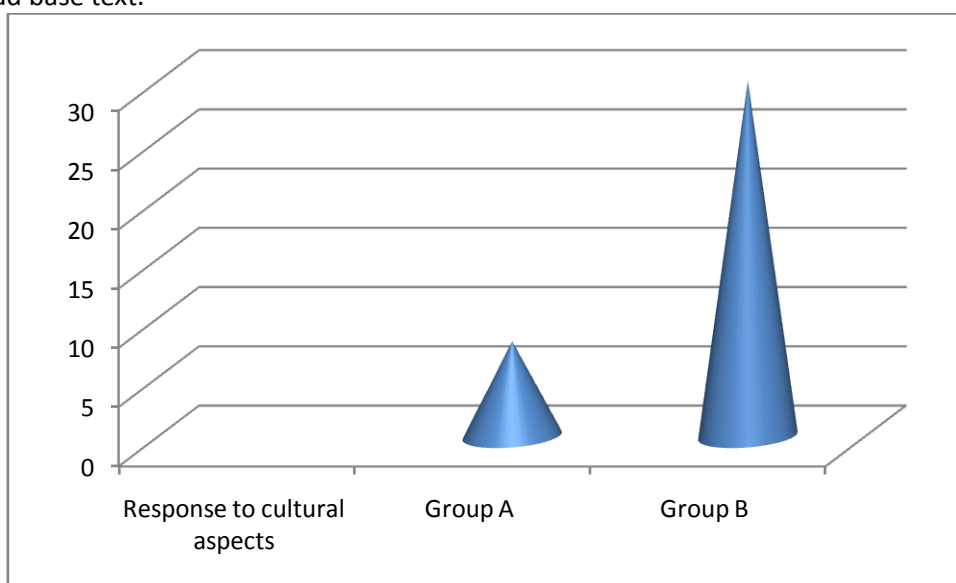
The researcher had a discussion with a predetermined set of questions as mentioned above. The intention of the discussion and questions focused on narrative and thematic elements of the text and its socio cultural atmosphere revealed in the story. The students were asked to share their emotional feelings responses to the text they read and to relate them to any of their personal experience. The differences in the response are recorded basing on their reading of original and abridged versions separately. There is a comparative analysis of the opinions given by two groups. Each group opinion is documented, analyzed and discussed.

### DATA ANALYSIS

For the purpose of the analysis of the collected data, the qualitative method is followed since the outcome of the investigation is to understand the differences between the abridge text reader and the base text reader. The two versions supplied to the students and the data analyzed basing on the responses of the two groups students. First, data classified into mass and then designed labels are given to them. There was a comparative study on these two groups for formulating the theories of the objective of the paper. The study of the two groups established that the abridged text reading makes the reader to lose the socio and cultural aspects of the text where the base readers enjoyed and understood them. Out of 72 students from both the groups, 54 students understood the story at their reading, 8 students fail to understand the story and 10 students did not respond properly.



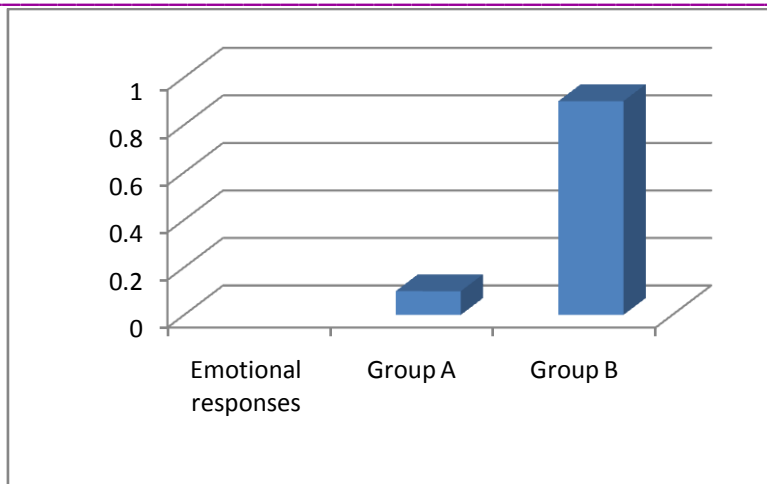
When the investigation marched towards cultural and social aspects of the story, the response from Group one is completely different from group two. Group one 32 students read the abridged text where group two read base text.



While the investigation is going on, the researcher guided both the groups to find out the socio and cultural aspects and emotional responses after reading the story. The base story readers caught certain elements like;

1. "Why don't you go to school in a *Jutka*?"
2. "Loaf about less on Sundays"
3. "No amount of protest from Swami was of any avail"
4. "Worst perjurer on earth"
5. "For all this disgrace, humiliation and suffering, who would be responsible"?

Both the groups were asked to share their emotional responses to the above said situations.



**FINDINGS**

Through the participation in the research, it is found that the major difference between reading the abridged text and the base text. While making the text editing, the major social and cultural issues of the text and atmosphere of the story is lost. The abridged text reader failed to understand the situations, emotions and other cultural aspects behind the characters and their symbolic representation of the text. The responses about the characterization, action, motivation, theme and cultural differences in expression are totally ignored while editing the text.

The students who were involved in reading the original text included more events in their story repetition and also referred to attitudes and motives of the characters. They also understood the major differences in usage of vocabulary, syntax and symbols. The abridged text readers focus is only on the content but not on the cultural complexity of the characters. Finally this research exhibits the importance of reading the original text rather than abridged version of the text. May the curriculum requirements force the text to be edited according to the parameters of the syllabus; it is the responsibility of the teacher to introduce the socio cultural aspects behind the abridged texts.

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