



## Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Kamila Shamsie's Short Story *the Walk*

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### ABSTRACT

*This research is concerned with the application of two key approaches of cognitive stylistics i.e. Schema theory and Text World Theory approach to Kamila Shamsie's short story The Walk (2020). The role of cognitive analysis in interpretation of the text is manifold as it reveals how a creator of the text takes care of the text at discourse level and at text-world. Exposing himself or herself to the audience, the author conveys the message and the reader decode the embedded message conveyed through the specific text. Thus constructing textual meanings not simply requires further elaborations but needs reader's 'mental space' involvement in the process of creating the Text world. Text world theory aims to clear the distance laid between the reader and author. The 'reading experience' involves the focus of cognitive stylistics as what happens when this action of reading the text happen and also how this action shape the construction of meaning and interpretation of text (cf. e.g., Ibrahim, 2014; Stockwell, 2015). "Text World Theory (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007; Whiteley, 2011) has given us answers to the questions as how and why readers construct meanings while performing the act of reading (Patricia Canning). Where on one hand the Text-World theory tells us how meanings and interpretations are constructed, on the other hand the Schema theory helps us to understand how coherence is achieved by connecting the vacant dots created by the author and solved by the reader.*



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### INTRODUCTION

This research explains how a reader respond to a short story about the restrictions and a quarantined region imposed due to Covid-19. It also explains the writer's approach towards an idea and a problem. The key devices of cognitive stylistics are Schema-Theory, Text-World Theory, Conceptual-Metaphor and Mental-Space Theory. But in the present research the concepts of Text-World Theory such as deictic expressions and world-repair notions are

discussed and analyzed that exists in *The Walk*. Moreover the schemas and the presence of past experience or knowledge of readers are tested here and analyzed while reading the text. The interesting factor about the field is how a reader and a writer see each other through the text they are part of. Cognitive Stylistics offers new insights into the world of Human cognition and Psychology as Patricia Canning in her latest studies tried to explore its new horizons by applying the cognitive devices on ‘only female prisoners’.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The present cognitive approach will highlight, interpret and reveal all the unsaid things existed in the story. The study will help the students of cognitive stylistics while studying the field. Kamila Shamsie’s recent works are not viewed from cognitive perspective. The study will shed some light on her work from such new and recent perspective. The application of the two basic devices of cognitive stylistics that are text related theories and Schema concepts, on the work can generate fresh ideas and interpretations. This study may enable readers and students of stylistics to explore the works of Kamila Shamsie’s work from Cognitive perspective.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this part of the research a detailed review of the key devices that are Text world theory and Schema theory has been done. Their different techniques and approaches to literature and also a discussion about Text by established Stylisticians. In this section the explanation of Text and Stylisticians, Text-World theory and Schema theory is given. Also, this part will mention the notable works or studies made into the field.

### **Text and Stylisticians**

The word ‘Text’ is mostly used interchangeably with the word of discourse. Views about texts change from subject to subject and from author to author. Here, the most cogent explanation is given by Dictionary of Stylistics by Katie Wells as the concept of ‘Text’ is normally used in many fields of linguistics and also in the subject of stylistics and literary criticism, but its definition is not without complexities and confusions. That’s why it cannot be easily differentiated from the word or the concept of discourse. Etymologically speaking the concept of text comes from a figurative use of the Latin Verb ‘textere’, ‘weave’, implying a series of sentences or words ‘interrelated’ fundamentally and semantically. Because it is a countable noun that’s why it is usually used in both the fields of linguistics and stylistics to mean a successive gathering of sentences or statements which create harmony due to its linguistic interrelation and semantic unity. The examples and instances can be taken from an essay or an article; a formula; poem; communal lecture; address, etc. Nevertheless, it is conceivable for a text to contain only one sentence or utterance, for example a notice board or road symbol (Exit, Stop), which is semantically whole in itself, and pragmatically knotted to a definite location or condition.

(Katie Wells, 2014). Further Peter Stockwell elaborated the job of stylisticians in the process; When stylisticians of literature talk about ‘style’, they have conventionally mentioned to the word-based patterns that are caused because of selections and choices made by the writers. The originality of the author or his and her creativity is not the only valid concern. But rather their authorial creativity has been detected due to the inspirational spirit behind the work of text.

And that's why it is the text that has been the emphasis of examination and interest. Equally important are the other facets of stylisticians, such as they have traditionally concentrated on the text as the location for meaning and aesthetic form, with the seeing reader being recognized merely as the area where the effects of sense, feeling, or assessment occurred. The creativeness of the reader has never been a concern for the traditional stylisticians (Peter Stockwell,).

Mahmoud in his 'Doctoral' thesis (2020) offers a complete cognitive stylistic analysis of three present-day novels by Egyptian writers: Karim Alrawi's (2015) *Book of Sands*; Khalid Al Khamissi's (2006) *Taxi* and Naguib Mahfouz's (1985) *The Day the Leader Was Killed*. It applies two prominent theoretical frames which are Text-World (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007) and Blending-Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). His thesis has three vital goals: it shows the way in which Text-World Theory aids readers to comprehend the story as a theoretical structure consisting of three interlinked level or layers. These levels can be termed as 'conceptual interconnected layers', which are the discourse-world, text-worlds and sub-worlds. It exposes the significant part of the Blending Theory does while appropriately interpreting the sentence-level metaphors. Further his thesis shows that how irony and humor, resulting from the complexities of incompatible elements that are present in the metaphoric mixtures. Further how they are utilized to overtly criticize the main and dominant political and socio-cultural issues current in Egypt. Lastly, it demonstrates the blend of Text World Theory and Blending Theory, through which he becomes successful to develop a method that empowers readers to fully comprehend the novels on both minute and bigger levels (2020).

Another work relevant to the core concept of Cognitive stylistics is made by Elena Glotova (Dept. of English, North Ossetian State University, Vladikavkaz, Russia). Her paper (2014) focuses to inspect the mind style of anguishing central character in A. Chekhov's "Sleepy" and K. Mansfield's "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" in cognitive stylistic tradition (Semino 2002, 2006). The plots signify remarkable case of "Chekhovian influence" in Mansfield's works which is connected and related to resemblances in plot and setting. Her study has demonstrated how cognitive type approach to **narrative** work can enhance literary meanings and interpretations, just through by noting the facets of characterization of fictional individuals. These fictional individuals' thoughts and behaviors can be gauged through use of language spoken in the text. (ACADEMY PUBLISHER Manufactured in Finland, 2014)

In her remarkable work by Canning. P (University College Roosevelt, Netherlands) developed a complete new notion of how a real-time reader, experience the meaning and construction of interpreting the text by experimenting her test on female prisoners (2017).

According to Patricia Canning, until now the main focus of the great cognitive researchers, were mainly upon the readers' responses to literature. They have mainly centered their observations on 'idealized' reader or an 'experimental' one which were obtained from within the academy and conducted using artificial or edited literary fiction. Furthermore, the layout of traditional book groups where members read texts privately and debate them at later stages. Therefore, the data from such experiments is called post-hoc data. That's why the findings of Patricia are genuine in nature and also can be trusted. Her study is therefore regarded as first of its kind and a very recent one, which has analyzed the real-time readers, if we are to quote exactly the term she used ('read.live.learn'). Her study is concerned with Northern Ireland's only female prison. She herself termed the experiment a unique because it dealt with

the post-hoc prejudice (2017). She performed a splendid job by further adding to and enhancing the growing field of cognitive stylistic.

Ghani made his research (2016) in Cognitive Stylistic study of poetic discourse. His study was related to the examination of cognitive stylistic in the poem of Emily Dickinson. To reveal the impact of different approaches of cognitive stylistic devices, the researcher in discussion used especially the concepts of mental spaces on the meaning and interpretations. His findings disclose the facts that such mental spaces can assist in constructing grammars that depict the poet's world view. These spaces are used for creating various dynamics and helpful in generating mapping of the language (2016).

Giovanelli (2016) while 'Construing the Child Reader' analyzed stylistically the "Opening to Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book". "Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book (2009) narrates the story of Nobody Owens, a boy who is adopted by supernatural forces. These supernatural entities took the boy in their hold after the boy's family members were murdered. His analysis worked on the idea of "construed reader,". He therefore utilized the two cognitive stylistics methods to criticize and assess the first part of the novel. The article thus examined the importance of family in different contexts. The analysis viewed the scene and world through the lens of Text-World Theory (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007), but also assimilates some features of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008), which create more slight variation in the features of literary text. His work gave special attention to the methods or frames of Gaiman and in addition also to his opinions about the special position of readers from which they the text of any literary or non-literary piece. Moreover, his analysis did consider the stylistician views about children's literature make up itself with focusing attitude towards young children minds (2016).

Jaafar from University of Baghdad made an attempt on Schema and Text- world theories. Her article is about "Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Selected Literary Texts" (2020). Her study is aimed especially at the interpretation of literary text while applying the key concepts of cognitive stylistics. Moreover, her study unfolded the responses of readers toward connecting the text world with the real world. To say it more correctly her study tried to find how a reader bring his or her world to the world of an author which the text-world to some extent besides discourse world (2020)

As it is already mentioned that this research uses two key devices namely The Schema -- Theory and Text-World theory to explain how the minds of readers interpret the encoded message. Schemata help us to achieve cohesion and coherence in the text. Elaborating further, Schema theory is a basic concept in cognitive stylistics which is obtained from psychology and artificial intelligence. A schema is termed sometimes as script, frame or scenario having basic information which helps us comprehend the embedded information in something.

Cook (1994,:10) highlighted that schemata are basic to the process of text construction. He further shared the fact that these schemata can be productive and at the same time harmful in the process of interpreting the texts. He actually wanted to say that our prior knowledge can mislead us to a wrong interpretation of the text, if that knowledge or information is stored in negative ways. He also added that various uses of language can modify our exposure of the world.

These stylisticians like Culpepper and Semino (2002), Sperber and Willson (1986), Lahe (2010) have widened the field of cognitive stylistics which is related to schema theory. Thus their contributions enabled us to understand more deeply and look more closely with new insights at the literary texts. On the other hand Cook has concentrated on **cohesion** and **coherence** of the text at discourse levels to elucidate its influence on the readers. In this research paper the theories help us to understand the inferences and gaps laying in the text of the short story **The Walk** by Kamila Shamsie. The theory will highlight the Coherence and cohesion happened only when a reader takes part in the process of interpretation, as it is not done before to her short story.

### **Text-World Theory**

The term Text World is borrowed from the works Teun Van Dijk (1977). It falls within the definition of mental space of Fauconnier (1985). According to the Dictionary of Stylistics by Katie Wales near the end of the 20th century a strong interest started to develop in the field of cognitive science which led them to uncover the worlds of texts and discourses. These interests were primarily led by cognitive scientists or linguists. Also the development and innovations in the **schema theory**, the philosophical ideas and logic on imaginable worlds, the text-world theories came into existence. Since the innovative or creative interface among writer, reader, text and context in the creation and negotiation of meaning originates a cognitive **Text-World**. This world can be experienced exactly like as if there is a world which contained people, places and events. But such world is possibly at clash with our familiarity of the 'real' world. That imaginary world includes the mental worlds of characters themselves. Theorists like Cathy Emmott (1997) and Paul Werth (1999) took particular interest in the real process of text world-constructs. They also took great interest in the textual elements which are called deictic expressions and such elements consequently create more sub-worlds (A dictionary of Stylistics by Katie Wales, 2014).

To generalize the theory under discussion we can say that it (Text-World-Theory) is basically a cognitive model which shows the processing and functioning of human discourse. It is also greatly interlinked with other approaches. These approaches or fields include cognitive psychology, possible world's logic, and philosophy. The applications of such dynamic (text-world) theories to the latest short stories of literature will definitely enrich the field in general but particularly to the work of Kamila Shamsie.

Gavins (2007) while discussing the theories and concepts states that previous knowledge and experiences play an important role whenever we try to create a mental image of the people. Because for her language shapes reality and thus our mental world by stimulating and influencing us. She therefore termed the mental imagination or mental representations "text-worlds". She also asserted that these mental representations equipped us to picture and understand information we receive (Gavins, 2007,). That's why; the main and basic ground of Text-World-Theory is organized by cognitive and empirical ideas (Mahmoud).

TWT is in essence a form of human discourse which is founded on the mental representations of us. This representation can be seen in cognitive psychology and it is relative to experiential principle of cognitive science (Gavins, 2007)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Kamila Shamsie is a well-known Pakistani-British female writer. She has written many award winning novels and short story. Her novel 'Home Fire' was written and published in 2017. That won her a worldwide acclaim and recognition and turned into an award winning. This was her seventh novel which was long listed for the Booker Prize, and won the Women's Prize for Fiction (2018). She wrote many short stories and novels. That includes, Sham, In the City by the Sea, Salt and Saffron Kartography, Offence: the Muslim case, Burnt Shadows, A God in Every Stone, Home Fire and her latest short story The Walk published in The New York Time magazine project Decameron (2020). She is known for her distinct style and diction. Her themes include the modern trends of the day. In her recent short story she highlighted the current day predicaments and issues. Her short story The Walk is about restrictions, lockdown, social distancing and people's reaction towards them. In her widely acclaimed novel Home Fire, she dealt the issue of Islamophobia which is threatening the lives of Muslim people across the world.

## **Analyzing the Data**

Researchers differentiate between 'real-time' readers and 'experimental' readers. They have focused not only the **time** and **Space** of the writers but of the readers as well. A real-time reader response, while constructing the meaning and interpretation, is different because of his or her exiting situation. As Patricia Canning in her research on real time readers revealed a new dimension of existing experiences of female prisoners while making them to listen stories. Here in this research article a cognitive analysis is done to reveal how text-world is created with the joint venture of writer and reader. According to Joanna Gavins, developing interpretation is not a sole job of an author, it in fact happens when a reader takes active part in the process. In addition this analysis ought to look at those structural and textual elements that trigger meaning and interpretation of the text in the mind of a reader.

## **Background of the short story The Walk**

In 2020, when Covid-19 was ravaging and plaguing the whole world, The New York Times Magazine initiated a project by the name of 'Decameron' (The project's name is taken from Giovanni Boccaccio's work "The Decameron" which was written in 14<sup>th</sup> century Florence when the Plague was ravaging through the whole region). They asked 29 writers from across the world to write new short stories inspired by the moment. ([www.nytimes.com/magazine](http://www.nytimes.com/magazine))

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Text-world provides a complete guide line and framework with which it can view how a discourse-world, text-world and sub-world are built and how its participants involve in its communication. The framework can be used as a Participants in the text are termed as 'characters' (and further subdivided into actors and staying outsiders) by Werth (1999: 82; see also Emmott, 1992 and Gavins, 2007). When discourse-world information is communicated, meaning is conveyed and created because in this way the text-worlds are constructed jointly thus complexities are solved and any miscommunication rightly demonstrated and cleared (Patricia Canning). The reader, while reading and the writer during his or her writing experience, do not act separately rather they both are the integral part of the cognitive world (Paul Werth). So

therefore both participants are outside the text but both are not acting alone and without constructing the meaning.

### **Application of Text-World and Schema Theory to “The Walk”**

In “The Walk” (2020) while writing this short story the producer of the text did consider the previous knowledge and experiences of her readers. The readers are aware that what social distancing means and can understand the lockdown because of the context that has already been established and its meanings conveyed. Since this great and widespread plague was wreaking havoc across the globe, the people were facing the same restrictions due to Covid-19, that’s why talking in the context, without narrating the expressions of Social-distancing and Lockdown, it becomes much easier for the author to tell the story.

The significance of the title of the story is part of the story like other textual elements in the text. From the perspective of Text World Theory (TWT) the title of the story has many purposes. Viewing it at the discourse-world level, the title of the story tells its readers that it will be about a usual walk, to which each one is familiar. But at the Text-World level the readers through background knowledge and inference can specify the space and time of the story and its true objective.

**1-Azra swung open.... the gate .... “Are you sure”? her mother said..... from the garden where... walking ... circles, one ... every 45 seconds.**

The story deals with the awareness of the blessings that have been taken for granted. The desire to live in affinity with one another and the longing we have forsaken. The above extract from the story is the opening paragraph, telling its readers about the story’s main character Azra whose action of opening a gate raised her mother’s concern. The opening of the story tells about the space and location including the objectionable action made by Azra. The excerpt also gives its readers the physical view of time and space. Now the writer’s deliberate mention of “one circle every 45 seconds” is not without a reason. Readers can estimate the size of the of the garden’s width and length by taking note of 45 seconds. Azra’s mother objection over her opening of the gate raises many speculations in the mind of a reader. The interrogative sentence “Are you sure”? , has many interpretations even in the present context. But Kamila Shamsie used this expression to attract her readers’ attention to something which is serious and demanding. To view from Text world perspective, this expression has “deictic-function”. Because its meaning changes when its speaker change and here it is said by Azra’s mother so therefore the expression holds command and objection.

The focus and center of cognitive stylistics should be toward the language and the mind. However there should be a focus on the response of a reader as why their response has been activated and why such reaction should be expected. It must be highlighted that their response is due to the approach towards creative potentialities of a writer (Ali Abdullah Ghani-2016).

The story has an omniscient narrator indicating the presence of the outside world. Therefore positioned outside the text, the writer is not participating and thus confirming the notion of Discourse world. The third person narration is considered in literary criticism as an indirect way for offering a less intimate relationship between a reader and character (Gavins, 2007).

**2-“Everyone’s doing it, even women on their own” ... “Five minutes”! Zohra call “It took me five minutes to walk to you. Less”.**

In the above excerpt, at the text-world level, a feminist discourse seems to penetrate into a mother and her daughter arguments. Readers can easily find Azra’s answer a satisfactory one because of the discourse created by the outside world. As if something is done by everyone then it is considered a normal thing and our cognitive world don’t find it disturbing or upsetting. Readers can find interaction between Azra and Zohra a revealing one. The fear of security and safety are conveyed and only those readers whose schemata have the knowledge of Karachi situation in current day world. To comprehend the above extract in its context one needs to have prior information about the location and time of the area.

Gavins (2007) further states that conveying information between author and the reader is highly active and often constantly changing process. According to her any discourse has the potential to change abruptly or switch topics consistently thus making the text reader in perpetual change.

The same notion of “dynamic process, new information’, switch topic’ or change of scene” can be observed in the above excerpt from *The Walk*, which comes right after the first paragraph. The writer switched from one topic to another and also changed the scene quite abruptly. The information regarding Azra’s mobile phones is a tricky one. A reader can respond with a question that how can a thing be safer and make you at the same time a ‘target’? The process of world-switch occurs when a new character by the name of Zohra is introduced.

Spatial and temporal expressions go side by side causing its readers to world-switch and world-shift like in this sentence “halfway down the street. “It took me five minutes to walk to you. Less”.

The absence of any modalities in the opening expressions from the omniscient narrator shows that the information provided is to the point and factual. Also the **World-repair** process is happening at various points. Such as the initial part of the story tells its readers that there is something scary and dangerous going to happen to the main character of the story. The world-repair notion was given by Gavins (2007). She stated that some literary works include deliberate deception in order to amuse and surprise its readers. At some point in the text, the readers are able to realize what the trickery or deception is being played on to them. This causes the readers to repair and correct their mental representations accordingly. The story by Kamila Shamsie holds many surprising things that cause mental-representations to change at the end of story. Like the lockdown, social distancing and other restrictions which are merely implied due to the plague are in fact proving to be blessing in disguise. The author conveyed her message creating gaps for readers to fill as in the following incomplete information;

**3- In the subsequent text the temporal and spatial terms are in these words structured coherently;...three weeks since ... in the park, though Zohra ...daily to feed .....the security... one topic of conversation... subsets of it. They meandered between the quotidian and the apocalyptic...**

The words and phrases are keys to open the message and create interpretations. Connecting the pieces of information which is based on experience and cultural or traditional



background through stored knowledge and information known as schemata are bound to change. These schemas later on take on new shape of knowledge which is important to guess what is going on the text. Readers' schemas can be challenged here because of the misconceptions they may have about the unsecured city. That's why such schemas regularly got updated and changed. Schemata, nevertheless, are significantly important for readers to make interpretations about what is going on in a text or film, to fill in gaps and to make it coherent (Katie Wales, 2014). Applying the theory of schema and in order to create coherence, the above information can be transformed into full conveyed information. Their walking into the park after three weeks reveal to its readers the imposition of lockdown and the conversation they made was surely about the COVID-19.

**4- The traffic, the one-way streets. "Wash your hands", "yes, yes, all right, Ms. Paranoid". , nearly 25 years ago.... First interaction.... Early April .... memory ... Karachi...**

Readers and listeners laugh at jokes when they read or hear them because of the cognitive compatibility between readers and writers. A reader may create his her own sub-world while reading the excerpt. What will it look like? It may display certain dominant traits such as the word Ms. Paranoid was uttered for Azra, describing her mental occupation and constant precautions. But to match her recent actions of getting out of home despite lockdown might question her indecisiveness about her overall cautious nature.

**5- Everyone waved... was delighted.... made a great show of keeping a distance... Preadolescents....unaccompanied by adults.**

The fact of social distancing and happiness of meeting one another is shown through in the words "everyone waved". The event of the walk is not a normal or usual one in this story but a special one. No one before ever felt so much blessed and happy, for merely seeing one another and Preadolescents don't worry about their safety and neither Azra and Zohra.

The conclusions we can draw from the data is variegated and multifarious. It includes several aspects of reader's and writer's cognition. If we exclude the context or the previous experience of reader and writer then the text cannot exist on its own. For meaning and interpretation it has to rely on the schemas and past experiences of the stack holders. Without stating directly the words of Covid-19 and lockdown, the story is only meaningful and conveys its message because of the context in which it is being narrated.

## **CONCLUSION**

The cognitive analysis of literature reveals certain facts about the author and simultaneously also about the readers. The co-construction work of interpretation and meaning is not done without the participation of either. In this research article the application of Schema and Text-World theories to the short story The Walk analyzed the unrevealed aspects of daily life. The research has highlighted the cognitive aspects of the reader and the writer. The discourse world and the text worlds are developed and communicated between a writer and a reader. Further the study has discussed in detail the key devices of cognitive stylistics; The Text-World Theory and its different levels that are Discourse level, Text-world level and sub-world level. The Schema Theory was also explored with its script, frame or scenario. The short story by Kamila Shamsie is viewed through methodology and framework of Cognitive stylistics.

Applying its key devices, the research brought into light the sub-world of a reader while creating an almost different cognitive mental space.

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