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## Cultural Differences based on a Silent Film: A Comparative Analysis of Hungarian and Jordanian University Students' Written Narratives

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### Abstract

In the context field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the study was conducted on Hungarian and Jordanian university students (mean age 21), who were all enrolled in English studies programs. Participants were asked to create narratives based on a silent film exploring their feelings, the relationship between dreams and reality, and emotional fulfillment. Thematic analysis (TA) and LIWC-22 were used to examine the connection between cultural influences and narrative content. The analysis revealed distinct word frequencies, and cultural schemas, such as story setting, love, societal expectations, family bonds, and gratitude, which differed between the two groups. The study also found that shared writing styles emerged, emphasizing common themes of regret and the pursuit of autonomy. Moreover, Jordanians demonstrated more collectivist tendencies, while Hungarians leaned towards individualism. These findings provide valuable narrative insights into creative writing in diverse cultural contexts in EFL settings.

### Keywords

English as a foreign language (EFL); written production; Cultural schemas; Collectivism and individualism; Silent films; Thematic analysis

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## Introduction

In today's interconnected world, English serves as the universal language. Its importance goes well beyond the countries where English is the first language and has become a bridge across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Rao, 2019). English has become a language of international diplomacy, trade, and cultural exchange, serving as a unifying force that facilitates communication among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Jenkins 2020). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is important in enabling individuals to engage with the broader global community, provide the skills needed to communicate across borders, access international educational resources, and engage in cross-cultural dialogue (Cook 2007; Martínez et al. 2022). The learning process is significantly influenced by learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Language acquisition is linked to one's cultural context and native language (Kramsch, 2014; Byram, 2013). Understanding the connection of these factors in EFL learning is central to assessing proficiency and communication effectiveness. Diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape learners' language use, affecting vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies (Kaplan, 2017). The influence of the native language on acquiring a foreign language affects various linguistic aspects (Cook, 2008; Odlin, 1989). This exchange of cultural and linguistic elements extends beyond language structures to attitudes and perceptions (Dörnyei, 2005). Learners' motivations and self-identification with English are shaped by their cultural contexts. Cultural differences in learning attitudes and language-related anxiety impact language acquisition (Yashima, 2002). This complex relationship between culture and language stresses the need for comprehensive exploration in writing contexts.

Writing, as Horváth (2000) posits, is a complex activity involving idea development, knowledge translation, and narrative construction. Studied across disciplines like cognitive psychology, rhetoric, and writing pedagogy, it reflects cultural and linguistic influences (Leki, 2006; Pennycook, 1994). EFL learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape their writing, evident in content, structure, and style choices (Kubota, 1998; Canagarajah, 2006).

Cultural impact on writing is seen in metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and discourse conventions. The influence of the native language on writing in a foreign language extends beyond surface language features to organizational patterns and narrative structures (Matsuda, 2003; Cumming, 1989).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Culture and language

Language and culture have a shared connection, each significantly shaping the other. Sapir (1929) observed that language not only expresses ideas but also molds them. Whorf (1956) expanded on this with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, suggesting language shapes perceptions and thoughts. Language embodies a culture's history, memory, and collective identity through idiomatic expressions and metaphors. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for cross-cultural research, as it underscores the ways in which culture shapes the use of language (Hofstede 2001; Sapir 1929; Whorf 1956). Understanding cultural differences between cultures has been made possible in large part by Geert Hofstede's cultural aspects, such as individualism-collectivism. In cross-cultural psychology and management research, these aspects hold even though they were developed using data gathered in the 1960s and 1970s. But it's important to acknowledge that cultures change throughout time, requiring scholars to continue their contributions. Recent efforts have focused on acknowledging the diversity within cultures, particularly in Arab states, with updated scores based on studies like Almutairi, Heller, and Yen's 2020 research. Additionally, Hofstede Insights cultural experts have collaborated to incorporate scores for countries not covered in previous publications. This dynamic approach ensures the continued relevance of the cultural dimension model in understanding cultural variations in our ever-changing world.

Su-Yuen and Rubin (2000) explored linguistic traits linked with these dimensions, finding correlations with writing styles such as personal anecdotes or indirectness. Sullivan et al. (2012) observed dispositional collectivism as a predictor for social morality and repressive suffering construal (RSC), contrasting with individualist orientations. Mesquita (2001) explored emotions in collectivist cultures, revealing their connection to social worth and self-other relationships. Steele and Lynch (2013) challenged assumptions of collectivism in China, noting a shift towards individualist aspects of happiness. These studies underscore how cultural values shape emotional expression and human experiences, informing our examination of collectivist and individualist sentiments in cross-cultural narratives.

## 2.2 Cultural schema theory

Cultural Linguistics examines the relationship among language, culture, and conceptualization (Sharifian and Palmer, 2007; Sharifian 2011, 2013, 2014). Similarly to cognitive linguistics, cultural Linguistics believes that meaning is conceptualization but places a strong focus on how culture shapes conceptualization. Analytical tools like 'cultural schema,' 'cultural category,' and 'cultural-conceptual' metaphor are used to investigate language features rooted in culture. These tools, collectively referred to as cultural conceptualizations, are explored in studies conducted by Sharifian (2003, 2008, 2011).

Schemas are quintessential to human learning, thinking, and behavior as they are activated, functioning as a network of interconnected neurons that recognize, fill, and update patterns observed in everyday life (Rumelhart, 1980). Cultural Schema Theory outlines mental frameworks influenced by cultural background and social context, shaping how individuals perceive and interpret the world (Yoshimura, 2014). Acknowledging different cognitive structures among cultures (Triandis, 2002), this theory holds relevance in intercultural communication, cross-cultural psychology, and language teaching, showing how cultural backgrounds affect communication and implicit norms (Hong et al., 2000). Practical applications include strategies for effective cross-cultural communication, enhancement of intercultural competence, integration of cultural elements into language instruction (Kinger, 2013), aiding in creating culturally relevant and engaging learning experiences, and endorsing a deeper understanding of language nuances (Byram, 2008).

Strauss and Quinn's "A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning" (1997) is a fundamental work in schema-related sociology, paralleling DiMaggio's (1997) review in emphasizing the role of schema-based cognition in comprehending cultural processes and shared knowledge. They defined schemas as cognitive mechanisms organizing related knowledge pieces and proposed that cultural knowledge and meaning originate from internalized networks of cognitive associations shaped through repeated experiences over time. The meanings of concepts are stored in networks of associations among multiple neural units, indicating that cognitive schemas play a major role in shaping memories from the past, perceptions from the present, and expectations for the future. Within this model, meaning is intrinsically relational, connected to numerous schema-based associations, and ready for construction or reconstruction with each activation.

## 2.3 The use of silent films in writing

Silent films are an innovative way to teach languages, encouraging both creativity and language proficiency. According to the dual-coding theory (Pavio, 1990), information is concurrently stored by the verbal and visual cognitive systems as verbal and visual codes, respectively. The study by Sabri and Adiprabowo (2022) emphasizes the use of nonverbal cues in animated movies, which make use of exaggerated imagery to convey ideas effectively. Kramsch (2014) emphasizes the importance of silent films in language learning and their relationship to context, culture, and communication. Silent films are a creative way to teach languages, encouraging both creativity and language proficiency. According to the dual-coding theory (Pavio, 1990), information is concurrently stored by the verbal and visual cognitive systems as verbal and visual codes, respectively. The study by Sabri and Adiprabowo (2022) emphasizes the use of nonverbal cues in animated movies, which make use of exaggerated imagery to convey ideas effectively. Kramsch (2014) emphasizes the importance of silent films in language learning and their relationship to context, culture, and communication.

According to Putri and Andanty's (2023) study, silent-animated films were viewed as useful resources by Indonesian EFL students for enhancing narrative text compositions. The students noted that the films were engaging, inventive, and demanding. Comparably, Kartika et al. (2017) investigated how silent short films affected vocational high school students' EFL writing skills and discovered notable gains in several writing-related areas. Together, these studies highlight how silent films can be useful tools for improving EFL writers' abilities. This is consistent with our use of theme analysis to examine how language, culture, and learning objectives interact with written narratives and silent film storytelling.

## 2.4 Cross-cultural Studies

According to Jenkins (2023), the experience of comparing storytelling styles across cultures can be enlightening. Furka (2020) argues that the source of misunderstandings between individuals from distinct cultures lies in the variations in their home cultures' values that they internalize during their socialization and by intentionally

addressing these differences in values within the context of foreign language education, language learners and users can develop more culturally and linguistically appropriate behavioral patterns.

Cross-cultural studies provide a unique lens through which to explore the complex nature of humanity. These studies not only provide an appreciation for diverse worldviews, traditions, and social practices but they also maintain mutual respect and tolerance among culturally distinct groups and improve communication to avoid misinterpretations (Siahaan, 2008; Sharifian, 2014). By examining the way culture shapes individual beliefs, behaviors, and communication styles, they reveal the varied ways in which people navigate their worlds (Triandis, 2002). Furthermore, when focusing on different cultures, these studies facilitate the identification of commonalities and differences, thereby offering valuable insights across a spectrum of fields, such as psychology, education, linguistics, and social sciences (Berry et al., 2002). In the specific context of EFL education, studying culture becomes an enriching opportunity to uncover the complexities of language acquisition, usage, and cultural influences, thus equipping educators with the unique needs of culturally diverse learners (Hu & McKay, 2012).

The use of writing within an EFL context serves as a compelling avenue for exploring diverse cultures. Zamel (1992) states that writing allows us to represent our learning, and our ways of making meaning, and teaches us the most profound lesson about how we read, write, and use language, about what it means to know. Writing, as a form of linguistic expression, not only provides a window into language proficiency but also offers a unique perspective on cultural influences. According to Kramsch (2014), written texts are important for the study of cultural features since they represent worldviews, cultural values, and ways of communication. Learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds frequently complete writing assignments in EFL classes that reflect on their viewpoints, cultural conventions, and personal experiences. This diversity enables researchers to scrutinize how cultural factors manifest in language use, narrative construction, and the conveyance of emotions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Whether it's analyzing the narrative structures or thematic content of written texts, writing provides a tangible means to navigate the nuanced interplay between language and culture, shedding light on how different cultural backgrounds shape linguistic expression and communication.

#### **2.4.1 English in the Jordanian context**

Arabic in Jordan holds a dual role as both the official language and the language used in daily interactions. English, on the other hand, serves as the primary foreign language, particularly in business and commerce. It is extensively taught in both public and private schools and is well-understood by the upper and middle classes. English also holds a co-official status in the education sector, with the majority of university-level classes conducted in English. In both public and private schools, English is taught alongside standard Arabic (Dweik, 1986). In a study by Dweik and Mohammad (2019) on the effect of the spread of English as a lingua franca on Jordanian society and its languages, they found that people in Jordan have shown strong support for their language, Arabic, as well as their culture and identity. Learning English is beneficial because it allows Jordanians to stay updated on technology and science, opens good job prospects, helps improve their financial situation, helps them connect with people from various cultures, and makes their everyday life easier. Tahaineh and Daana (2017) found that students primarily displayed instrumental motivation to learn English while integrative motivations have less influence, students maintain positive attitudes towards an English-speaking culture, presenting critical implications for English language teaching by emphasizing the need to consider students' motivations and attitudes in the pedagogical process.

Dweik (2000) highlights numerous cultural distinctions between Arabic and English that may lead to unfavorable influences in the writing domain and the vital need to enhance English writing skills in Arab tertiary education, especially for students for whom English is the second language of instruction. Studies show that there are significant challenges students face in meeting academic literacy standards and the overwhelming nature of writing in a second language, especially for Arabic-speaking students writing in English (Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad, 2018; Rababah, 2003). Writing in EFL within Arab educational contexts presents a unique platform to explore the interplay between language and culture, Bader (2015). The benefits of English writing skills are a fundamental educational goal in institutions where English is the medium of instruction (Khuwaileh and Shoumali 2000).

#### **2.4.2 English in the Hungarian context**

Despite Hungary being officially declared a monolingual country, it has been multilingual since the time Hungarians settled in the region. Children can start learning a foreign language from the first grade such as English, German, French, or Spanish. Many young people in Hungary select English as their first foreign language and German as their

second (Movchan, 2012). Hungary, situated at the crossroads between Eastern and Western Europe, has a unique cultural blend. Byram (2008) states that language learning within this context is not merely a matter of acquiring proficiency but also a journey into cultural expression. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) emphasized the role of culture in shaping Hungarian language use in the context of EFL. This observation highlights the importance of culture in shaping language use and pedagogical approaches in the Hungarian EFL context.

The relationship between language and culture is shown in EFL writing in the European and Hungarian contexts. The linguistically varied terrain of Europe, with its multitude of languages and cultural origins, provides material for investigating EFL writing, Byram (2008). The argumentative writing of Hungarian and North American college students was subjected to a contrastive rhetorical analysis by Godó (2008), which identified cultural differences in thesis statements, rhetorical devices, and the presentation of opposing views. The importance of visual texts for language acquisition and intercultural communication ability was highlighted by Kiss and Weninger (2017). According to their study, learners evaluate visual materials on a global, cultural, and personal level. This suggests that it's critical to include various interpretations in language classrooms to promote greater cultural awareness. The many argumentation schemata observed in Hungarian EFL contexts highlight the complex interplay among language, culture, and written expressions.

### 2.4.3 About the present study

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of culture on language learning and English writing in contexts where it is not the primary language, but there is still a significant knowledge vacuum regarding how these cultural factors shape the written production of individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds. Studies that have already been conducted have mostly concentrated on language proficiency and grammar, leaving uncharted terrain in terms of linguistic decisions and narrative expressions impacted by various cultural backgrounds. Given the unique linguistic characteristics of Arabic and Hungarian, including their structure, grammar, alphabet, and vocabulary, it was thought suitable to use English to explore the cultural subtleties between the two groups. Since both Hungarians and Jordanians speak English as a second or third language and are in the same age range, it is expected that this method will produce more genuine data in their written narratives. With an emphasis on identifying elements that are culturally significant for both Jordanians and Hungarians, the study attempts to investigate how the two groups are affected by the same stimulus by examining the ideas and attitudes that surface in their written narratives.

## 2.5 Research questions

RQ 1: How do variations in themes, perspectives, emotional responses, and cultural schemas influence narratives created by Jordanian and Hungarian university students in response to a common visual stimulus in an EFL context?

RQ 2: What are the differences in linguistic features between Jordanian and Hungarian university students' written narratives?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were university students between the ages of 19 and 24, all of whom were enrolled in English studies programs within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The study included two distinct groups: Hungarian participants (N=66, 36 males and 30 females), and Jordanian participants (N=64, 21 males and 43 females). All participants were the native speakers of their respective languages. Furthermore, both groups showed a comparable level of English proficiency, as they were Bachelor's students in their last year of English studies. These factors ensured a level playing field in terms of language proficiency and academic background, making the comparative analysis of linguistic and cultural differences more meaningful and insightful.

### 3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

This study used two tools to collect the data to facilitate a thorough exploration of the linguistic and cultural differences and similarities between Hungarian and Jordanian participants.

### 3.2.1 Language Profile (BLP)

The Language Profile (BLP) was adapted from Gertken et al. (2012) to gather essential information about the participants' linguistic backgrounds and their use of English, proficiency, and attitude. It was administered in a paper-based format. Subsequently, the data collected through the BLP were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate further analysis in the later stages of the study.

### 3.2.2 Written Production Task (Silent Film Narrative)

Participants were shown a 3-minute animated silent film titled 'Happiness' by Tuomas Tuppurainen, a media professional and designer from Finland, in 2016, and immediately afterward were asked to write a narrative of the film and a personal reflection. The 130 narratives were typed on Word docs to be further analyzed. The film artfully weaves a story by exploring the contrast between personal ambitions and the constraints of reality. The film opens with scenes portraying individuals standing at the train station. The protagonist in the silent film starts daydreaming which reflects his inner desires and longing. Through a series of events, the character imagines fulfilling his dreams, whether embarking on adventurous journeys, achieving professional success, or finding true love. These vivid daydream sequences capture moments of joy, triumph, and emotional fulfillment.

The study's chosen film is accessible at the following link:

["https://youtu.be/\\_O,"swhichPwas?si=\\_ZD07JGfGCjd6mk9"](https://youtu.be/_O,). The film showcased linguistic diversity and offered participants exposure to various language structures, vocabulary, and context.

## 3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from the narrative writing task were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This analysis allowed us to have a better understanding of the connection between culture and written production.

### 3.3.1 Bilingual Language Profile (BLP)

Data collected from BLP assessments were part of the quantitative analysis. The BLP assessments provided valuable information on participants' language proficiency, language use, and language attitude in both their native languages (Hungarian or Arabic) and English.

### 3.3.2 Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-22)

This software was used for psycholinguistic analysis of the narrative texts. This software enables automated identification of psychological traits embedded in characters' dialogue and the narrative styles of written narratives (Pennebaker et al., 2015). Various LIWC-22 categories shed light on the distinctive aspects of language use. LIWC-22 offers immense potential for enhancing the analysis of language in cinematic narratives, allowing researchers to study the psychological characteristics of writers and further our understanding of their linguistic expressions (Boyd et al., 2022). LIWC-22 provided data on word count, word frequency, and language Style Matching (LSM), generated word clouds, and compared the linguistic and psychological characteristics of narratives based on algorithms that have been informed by prior empirical research (cf. Jordan et al. (2019); Kacewicz et al. (2014) and Kalichman and Smyth (2021).

### 3.3.3 Thematic analysis (TA)

The coding process was adapted from methodologies outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2016) and O'Connor and Joffe (2020). The initial phase involved an exploration and familiarization with the narratives to gain a nuanced understanding. Subsequently, systematic data coding was used to identify relevant segments within the short-story texts, assigning corresponding codes to capture cultural themes and dimensions. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, intercoder reliability (ICR) was used where two coders (One Hungarian and one Jordanian) examined the narratives separately for both groups and coded the presence or absence of sentiments and cultural schemas and inclinations in each of the participants' narratives. ICR was assessed using Cohen's kappa, (Cohen, 1960), a statistical measure to quantify the level of agreement beyond chance between coders. Datatap (2023), an online statistical calculator, was used for the computation of Cohen's kappa, with separate assessments for the Hungarian and Jordanian narratives. The identification of recurring patterns within the coded data led to the emergence of potential themes. The analysis then progressed from specific text segments to general themes, exploring connections and



relationships among the assigned codes. Coders, in the interpretation phase, moved beyond describing themes to uncover their underlying significance. Finally, the reporting phase involved presenting the study findings, including the discovered themes and literary analysis, providing a complete understanding of the cultural nuances embedded in the narratives.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

#### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics (Bilingual language profile)

The Bilingual Language Profile (BLP) results indicate that the Jordanian and Hungarian groups have similar mean ages (Hungarians: 21.5 years and Jordanians: 21.3 years). Jordanians started learning English slightly earlier (5.2 years) than Hungarians (6.6 years). Hungarians reported a higher mean percentage of English language use (42.91%) than Jordanians (37.58%). Furthermore, both groups demonstrated good English proficiency, with Hungarians at a mean of 4.8 and Jordanians at 4.7 on a one to six scale. English attitude scores were also similar, with 3.9 for Hungarians and 4.0 for Jordanians.

Bilingual language profile analysis revealed that both groups were relatively homogeneous in terms of age, start of learning English, English use, English proficiency, and English attitude. These results suggest that the linguistic backgrounds and language learning experiences of the participants were reasonably similar, thus justifying potential variables.

## 4.2 Descriptive statistics from LIWC-22

Table 1 provides an insight into the average number of words in the narratives written by both Hungarian and Jordanian participants, in addition to the average number of words per sentence and the usage of complex or "big" words. This table demonstrates the differences in writing style between the two groups.

Table 1: Word Count Avg, Words per Sentence, and Big Words per Sentence Avg

	Word Count Avg.	Words per Sentence Avg.	Big Words per Sentence Avg.
Jordanians' Narratives	217	14	14
Hungarian' Narratives	151	17	16

#### 4.2.1 Word Frequency between groups

Figures 1 and 2 present word clouds generated by LIWC-22 from the narratives written by both Jordanian and Hungarian participants, based on the same silent film. These word clouds highlight the distinctions and commonalities in word choices between the two groups, as evidenced by the relative sizes of words within the clouds.

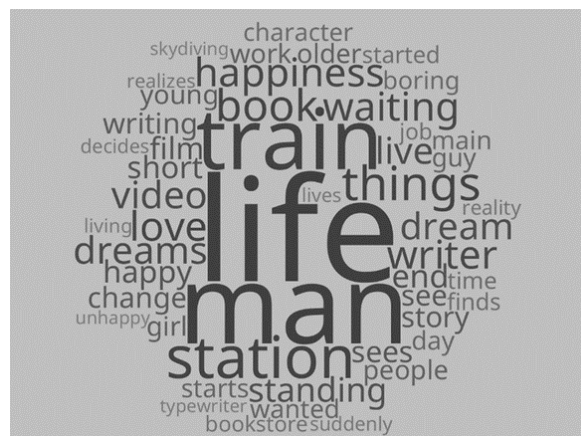


Figure 1: Word cloud Hungarians

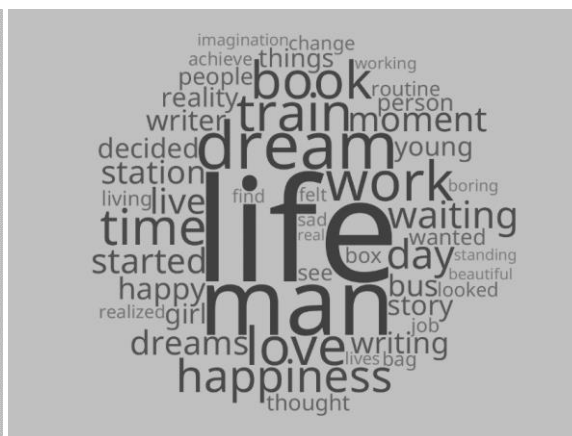


Figure 2: Word cloud Jordanians

The word frequency analysis offers a glimpse of the language preferences and trends within each group. By examining the prevalence of specific words or categories, we gained a better understanding of the topics and themes that captured the participants' attention. These findings allow us to explore the nuances in the narratives, shedding light on what mattered most to the participants, and how their storytelling reflects their cultural and individual perspectives.

**Table 2: Four clusters that incorporated the relevant words could be created to make comparisons of the word choices of the Hungarian and Jordanian participants.**

#	Word cluster	Word	Word Freq./ Jordanians	Word Freq. / Hungarians
1	Emotions	Happiness/ Happy	50	40
2		sad/ sadness/ unhappy/ Saddest	13	17
3		boring/ bored/ mundane/ monotone	18	23
4		Miserable	7	4
5		free/ freedom	9	3
6		Mid-life crisis	0	3
7		Haunting dream	8	8
8		Love Story/ love/ falling in love	55	29
9	Relationships and family	kissing	0	15
10		Date/dating	1	7
11		girlfriend	2	5
12		marry/ married/ marriage	11	0
13		Family/parents	9	0
14		Friend	8	0
15		Father/ dad	8	1
16		God/Allah	3	0
17	Silent film setting	Train	33	45
18		Bus	14	0
19		bookstore/ bookshop	9	20
20		library	8	2
21		Paris	7	10
22	Daydreaming	Dreams/ dreamt/ dream world	70	66
23		Imagination/ imaginary life/ imagine	24	19
24		daydreaming	2	13
25		travel/ travelling/ travelled	12	18
26		Skydiving/ parachuting	9	18
27		Playing videogames	8	7
28		typing machine/ typewriter	12	17
29		Writing/Writer/ Write	39	39
30		publish/ published	23	20
31		Childhood Dream/Old Dream	7	12

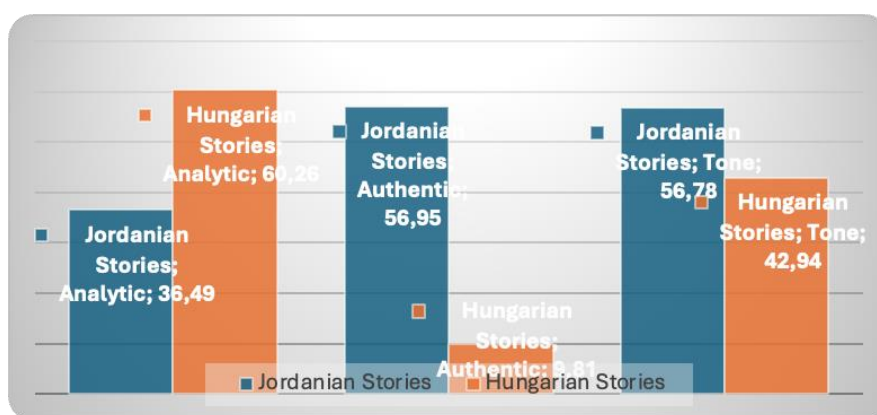


As shown in Table 2, certain words and themes were notably predominant in the narratives of both groups, whereas others showed distinct variations. These word frequencies serve as crucial markers for our upcoming findings and discussions, thematic analysis, and the exploration of cultural schemas, in which we dig deeper into narratives and their underlying cultural linguistic influences.

The analysis revealed a high Language Style Matching (LSM) score of 0.91 between Hungarian and Jordanian narratives. This high LSM score, which indicates linguistic similarity, suggests that despite their cultural differences, the two groups, who share a common age group and academic background, exhibit striking linguistic similarities in their narrative style, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. This alignment in language style could be attributed to the nature of the task itself, and English as the language of instruction for both groups. These results emphasize the influence of shared narrative experiences when conveying narratives (Ireland and Pennebaker, 2010).

#### 4.2.2 Summary measures: 2, and Emotional Tone.

The summary measures used in this analysis, including analytic, authentic, and emotional tones, were the result of sophisticated algorithms drawn from a range of LIWC variables.



**Figure 3:** Text characteristics: Analytic Thinking, Authenticity, and Emotional Tone.

##### 4.2.2.1 Analytic Thinking: Analytic Thinking

This dimension measures the degree to which language reflects formal, logical, and hierarchical thinking patterns. In the provided data, the Hungarian text (60.26) exhibits a notably higher level of analytic thinking than the Jordanian text (36.49), as shown in Fig. 3. This suggests that Hungarian narratives employ a more structured and logical language aligned with academic and reasoning-oriented discourse.

##### 4.2.2.2 Authentic

The algorithm for Authenticity is associated with increased interest in the perceived connection to another person. It gauges spontaneous speech without self-regulating or filtering. Phrases from the participants' narratives, such as *"I met my soulmate, Charlotte who showed me more beautiful colors in life."* *"I got the courage to confess my feelings to her."* *"She makes me someone else. She accepts me. I thought I will not find anyone who understands me and lightens my darkness."* The Jordanian narratives (56.95) scored higher in authenticity than the Hungarian narratives (9.81).

##### 4.2.2.3 Emotional Tone

Although LIWC-22 includes both positive tone and negative tone dimensions, The algorithm is built so that the higher the number, the more positive the tone. Numbers below 50 suggest a more negative emotional tone. Jordanians (56.78) exhibited a higher emotional tone than Hungarians (42.94) did. This suggests that Jordanian texts tend to convey more emotions. The word frequency analysis also highlighted more frequent emotional expressions in the Jordanian narratives as can be seen in table 2 above.

These linguistic and psychological dimensions highlight differences in how Jordanian and Hungarian participants express themselves and structure their narratives.

### 4.3 Findings from the thematic analysis (TA)

The findings of themes offer a rich presentation of perspectives on life, values, and societal norms within their respective cultural contexts. These themes highlight the cultural and societal underpinnings that shape the way individuals in these two distinct regions perceive and convey matters of dreams, regrets, decision-making, family bonds, and societal constraints, and show gratitude and contentment.

**Intercoder reliability:** The thematic analysis of the 66 Hungarian and 64 Jordanian narratives, evaluated using Cohen's Kappa, revealed substantial intercoder reliability with scores of approximately  $k = 0.8715$  and  $k = 0.9220$ , respectively. These high levels of agreement between coders are based on categorizing narratives according to the presence or absence of cultural schemas and cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism, as defined by Geert Hofstede.

#### 4.3.1 Similar themes between the two groups

##### 4.3.1.1 Autonomy and Decision-making

In examining this theme, both Jordanian and Hungarian participants notably share a common focus on individuality. Their narratives emphasized personal aspirations, freedom, and the consequences of missed opportunities with 28 Hungarian instances and 26 Jordanian ones. Both Jordanian and Hungarian narratives highlight self-discovery, the pursuit of a fulfilling life, and seizing opportunities. Despite their shared acknowledgment of life's fleeting nature, Hungarian narratives encourage the proactive pursuit of dreams, while Jordanian narratives underscore emotional turmoil stemming from unfulfilled aspirations. These findings reveal the prevailing individualistic perspectives of both groups. The narratives provided by the Jordanian and Hungarian participants exemplify this theme through the quotes illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Quotes for 'Autonomy and decision-Making' theme**

Jordanian	Hungarian
<i>"One day with the light of the sun in an ordinary, boring, dark and hopeless work day. I see that I am not anymore blind. where are my dreams that I did all that for?? Where am I? why am I here? No, I will come back FROM NOW ON!"</i>	<i>"One life, be who you want to be. Be with people you want to be with. Life is supposed to be hard, but it is not. You are born to go to school. Learn those things you want to do in life, not those you don't want. So, yes, it is this easy."</i>
<i>"I think you should do what you love because life is short and work and money are not everything."</i>	<i>"Be brave, step out of the line and the vicious circle and do what makes you feel alive."</i>
<i>"He knew that any dream to be achieved needs a real well and a real step forward in order to get out of this dull life."</i>	<i>"The moral of the story is that everyone should live their life as they want. So, achieve everything you dream about."</i>
<i>"Do whatever you love not what you should do."</i>	<i>"We can all imagine a better life for ourselves, but we also have to act on it if we want change."</i>

This is consistent with Hofstede's assertion (2001) that in individualistic societies, the focus is on personal achievements and rights, with priority placed on the needs of oneself and one's immediate family. According to Chirkov (2008), the functional role of autonomy is universal: the more people experience autonomy support, the better their psychological health is. In contemporary cross-cultural literature, autonomy is approached either as an innate and universal human inclination or as a set of culturally embedded moral values intertwined with broader cultural meanings and practices.

##### 4.3.1.2 Regret and Lost Opportunities

Similarly in this theme, both Hungarian and Jordanian participants share a common understanding of the fleeting nature of life and missed opportunities. In the narratives, there were 28 Hungarian instances and 24 Jordanian ones that showed a sense of regretted opportunities slipping away, emphasizing that life can become monotonous and unfulfilled if one does not take the initiative to pursue dreams. These instances are exemplified by quotes from both groups in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Quotes for 'Regret and Lost Opportunities' theme**

Jordanians	Hungarians
<i>"Reality became the antagonist in my story. It didn't want me to achieve my goals"</i>	<i>"If you don't do the things you're interested in while you are young, you may never have the chance to do them."</i>
<i>"The train arrived, all that dream disappeared in a second and I went back to my desperate life. "</i>	<i>"He is snapping back to reality, his boring, grey everyday lifestyle... "</i>
<i>"I found myself in a vortex of thoughts about who I am. Does my existence have an impact on this world? It feels like everyone's moving ahead... and I'm the only one who's lost my way. It's like I'm the only loser, the only one standing still"</i>	<i>"Our hero wonders if he would turn out like that old man, growing old with the job that he hates, and living an unhappy life "</i>
<i>"The only thing more unthinkable than leaving was staying"</i>	<i>"I think if we want to change, we have to do so because when we become old, we will regret it."</i>

Both groups recognize missed opportunities and the impact of time on their lives. Hungarian narratives advocate proactive change and pursuing dreams, while Jordanian narratives highlight emotional turmoil and regret from inaction. These shared considerations reflect individualistic perspectives in both cultures. Roese and Summerville (2005) found in their studies that education, career, and romance were the most frequently regretted life domains, perceived as having the highest potential for change.

#### 4.3.2 Differing themes between the two groups

The narratives from Hungarian and Jordanian participants offer distinct perspectives on various themes. Distinct cultural schemas shape narratives, signifying societal and individual influences on play within narratives. Moreover, the narratives underscore the more prevalent collectivist cultural dimension in Jordanian narratives and a clearer inclination towards individualism in Hungarian narratives.

##### 4.3.2.1 The setting of the silent film

An intriguing observation surfaced from the participants' narratives regarding the setting of the silent film. As seen from Table 3, the word *'bus'* was mentioned 14 times by Jordanians and never by Hungarians, while *'train'* was mentioned 33 times by Jordanians and 45 times by Hungarians. While the film clearly depicted the main character in a train station, Jordanian narratives diverged significantly, with 14 narratives portraying the setting as a bus station. By contrast, none of the Hungarian narratives referenced a bus station, adhering to the film's overt train station setting. The following quotes show examples from the Jordanian participants' narratives:

*"Every morning, he wears his clothes and goes to the bus station to go to work."*

*"I was waiting at the bus station, staring at people until the bus arrived so I can take it and go back home to watch TV and do nothing else"*

*"I will miss Rose and my adventures, but it's fine I will meet them anyway tomorrow while I am waiting for the bus."*

*"He was shocked with reality and got on the bus to go to his hated job".*

The differing interpretations of the setting may reflect distinct cultural schemas between the two groups. Trains are commonly used in Hungary but virtually nonexistent in Jordan, influencing participants' interpretations based on cultural familiarity. This contrast underscores how cultural backgrounds can shape understanding of visual elements, even within the same silent film. Strauss and Quinn (1997) explain that neural connections in the brain develop and modify based on repeated experiences, activating neurons associated with consistent experiences or observations.

##### 4.3.2.2 Love and Relationship

The word *'kiss/ kissing'* surfaced 15 times in the Hungarian narratives yet was entirely absent from the Jordanian accounts. In stark contrast, the words *'marriage,' 'married,'* and *'getting married'* were recurrent in the Jordanian narratives, appearing 11 times but never surfacing in the Hungarian narratives. Other examples are the words *'girlfriend'* and *'date/dating'* being mentioned more in the Hungarian narratives than in the Jordanians. These

divergences in word frequencies provide an initial glimpse into the distinct thematic tendencies and focal points within the narratives of the two cultural groups.

A notable aspect of our qualitative analysis of the theme of love and relationship is the distinct portrayal of romantic elements by Hungarian and Jordanian university students, despite having watched the same silent film. While both groups acknowledged the protagonist's near-kiss moment in the film, a significant difference emerged in how they incorporated this element into their narratives. In the Hungarian narratives, kissing often takes center stage, with many references to characters preparing for a first kiss or being interrupted immediately before a kiss. Examples of Hungarian narratives are as follows:

*"He pumped into a girl and in the next scene as they are sitting in a park, their lips get closer to kiss but then a train comes."*

*"And as they were going to kiss, we heard a train/metro coming."*

*"They fall in love and spend a romantic evening watching the sunset. They kiss."*

*"At the bookstore, he accidentally bumps into a girl, whom he goes on a date, and as they are going to kiss, we hear a train/metro coming."*

Hungarian narratives, akin to individualistic cultures, often focus on romantic elements preceding marriage, highlighting personal happiness and individual fulfillment. These distinct perceptions underscore the influence of cultural norms in shaping views on marriage and relationships among different cultural groups. In Western individualistic cultures, sentiments of affection, tenderness, and commitment are commonly regarded as the essential foundations preceding marriage (Medora et al., 2002).

By contrast, Jordanian narratives tend to shy away from the direct mention of kissing. This variation is attributed to cultural factors, as Jordanian society places a great emphasis on conservative norms regarding public display of affection. Open discussions about sexuality are often considered taboo, and physical intimacy outside marriage is discouraged. This cultural context may explain the preference for subtle expressions of affection, such as handholding and hugs, rather than explicit kissing mentioned in Jordanian narratives. Al-Shdayfat and Green (2012) state that Jordanian society is fairly conservative concerning norms relating to sexuality, and the discussion of sex-related issues openly or within families is often unacceptable and taboo. Jordanian narratives frequently refer to 'marriage' despite its absence in the silent film.

*"When he decides to marry Anna and presents her with a wedding ring, he hears the sound of the loud train."*

*"I clash with a girl and I feel very Shy. But after that we meet again and again and I found with her, my life partner. I really loved her and I hope all of these things are real."*

*"My name is Cosmo and I'm an ordinary man. I have met the girl of my dreams. Rosalinda... and we plan to get married and spend the rest of our lives together."*

*"I think she likes me. So, after several days I go to marry her and she agrees."*

In collectivistic cultures, marriage fulfillment is rooted in meeting familial duties, such as ensuring family continuity through male heirs, securing support for parents, and emphasizing the instrumental functions of marriage (Hofstede et al., 2010). Marital satisfaction in such cultures is linked to societal and familial obligations and often overshadows personal contentment (Hofstede et al. 2010). In the Arab world, the family holds a paramount position as the cornerstone of society. It serves as a nurturing environment for its members, offering them compassion, intimacy, and unity. The journey of building a family commences with the institution of marriage.

Love and intimacy within marital relationships are evidently influenced by culture (Simmons et al., 1986). Hungarian and Jordanian participants' narratives reveal distinct perspectives on marriage, reflecting principles of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede et al., 2010). Individualistic cultures prioritize personal happiness and fulfillment in marriage, emphasizing individual satisfaction over societal duties (Lalonde et al., 2004). Conversely, in many collectivist cultures, intimacy, closeness, love, and commitment often develop post-marriage, underscoring cultural distinctions in emotional and intimate relationship development (Hart, 2007). People maintain cultural schemas, which are mental frameworks shaped by their cultural origins, early life encounters, and social environment (Yoshimura, 2014). These schemas, influencing attitudes towards public displays of affection and the significance of marriage, serve as lenses for constructing narratives. While universal themes of Love and Romance bind these narratives, cultural schemas enrich our understanding of cross-cultural narrative preferences. Through this interplay

of shared and distinct elements, narratives gain depth, offering a holistic view of how cultural and individual experiences shape storytelling.

#### 4.3.2.3 Family bonds and societal expectations

The narratives reflect tension between personal desires and societal expectations. However, Jordanian narratives appear to place a greater emphasis on the importance of family bonds, obligations, and societal expectations. This is echoed by the word frequencies, where the word *'father'* or *'dad'* was mentioned 8 times by the Jordanians but only once by the Hungarians (see Table 2.). The word *'friend'* was referenced eight times by Jordanians but was absent in the Hungarian narratives. Additionally, the word *'family'/'parents'* emerged 9 times in the Jordanian narratives but never in the Hungarian narratives even though there were not any scenes related to family or friends in the silent film.

The sway of parental influence showcases the authority parents maintain over their children's decisions, while the concept of family allocentrism, denoting the strength of familial closeness and commitment (Lay et al. 1990), potentially shapes the extent to which children consider their parents' perspectives. In the Jordanian narratives, characters frequently grapple with the conflict between pursuing their aspirations and fulfilling their commitments to family and society. This tension highlights the cultural significance of these bonds and sacrifices individuals from adhering to them. This underscores the notion that cultural and family ties are deeply ingrained in their decision-making processes, often hindering them from pursuing their dreams. The following quotes illustrate the weight of tradition and the family's role in shaping life decisions:

*"Classic life just like my father, grandfather, and my great grandfather spent their lives", "If my father was alive, he would be glad by seeing me today"*

*"Hamza decided to leave his home because of some family problems that made him go to another country to start a happy life away from problems".*

*"Then, when I start working, I am repaying my school loans and my parents' debts; it's outliving us. Isn't life about giving and taking?"*

*"It is actually like the Tawjihi (high school in Jordan) student who scored 99 and wants to study a major far away from medicine, for example, but they study medicine because of their family and society rules"*

These examples suggest that individuals often find themselves balancing their own aspirations with the duty to support their family, even if this means repaying their debt and loans. Additionally, the quotes exemplify the prevailing influence of family and societal expectations in guiding individuals' educational and career choices, even when these decisions may not align with their desires and ambitions. Based on Buunk et al. (2010), Eastern collectivist cultures continue to uphold a more significant parental role in their children's choices, highlighting family cohesion and collective needs over individual aspirations.

Other examples show the frequent presence of friends when making decisions, and other aspects of life:

*"He did not live any family moments and did not enjoy with his friends"*

*"He decided to take a break and went on vacation with his friends"*

*"The whole week after that I did not stop doing activities; swimming, sky diving, hiking, having fun with my Friends, a lot of things. actually, I cannot count".*

*Actually, I am grateful to my best friend as well. He was the one who convinced me to experience parachute jumping; as the idea of the book suggests,"*

Participants drew upon their own experiences and values even when these elements were not explicitly present in the silent film. This aspect adds a layer of cultural authenticity to the narratives and provides insight into the significance of friendship in the Jordanian participants' lives.

By contrast, in Western cultures, which prioritize personal desires and independence, individuals are accustomed to wielding personal control over their life choices, gradually departing from the tradition of a strong parental sway (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hungarian participants tended to emphasize the importance of living life to the fullest extent according to their terms. They criticize the societal norms and routines they perceive as constraining and limiting individual freedom. The following quotes show instances of this theme in the Hungarian narratives:

*"In the video, the man lives in solitude in order to fit in the society and follows norms that are constructed by his environment"*

*"Providing for yourself and your family is important, but happiness is the fundamental need that we have to have"*

*"We should live life how we want to, but society requires you to provide in order to get something in return. "*

This underscores the global theme of individuals seeking to balance their responsibilities to their family and society while yearning for a fulfilling and contented life. They appear to place a somewhat stronger emphasis on individual well-being and personal happiness, often questioning societal norms and the influence of the environment on their lives.

#### 4.3.2.4 Gratitude and contentment

Instances of gratitude and contentment were fewer in the Hungarians' (7) narratives than in the Jordanians' (14). Jordanian narratives express thankfulness and embrace life routines even when they seem mundane. The following quotes exemplify this theme in the Jordanians' narratives:

*"Say Alhamdulillah (thank God) for this routine"*

*"Sami accepts the fact of reality, and he goes to his work. He was happy, and he didn't feel sad or depressed"*

*"Hamza didn't think about the consequences. It's true that each one of us wants to achieve happiness and a decent life free of problems. but happiness doesn't mean separation. It's rather transforming everything that's negative into positive. "*

*"All of us want to be happy but there are so many things to consider before starting or doing something, the true taste of happiness comes after you have experienced Sorrow. So, live in the present and make the most of it"*

The quotes provided by the Jordanian participants in this study offer valuable insights into their perspectives on routine, contentment, happiness, and the journey towards it. For instance, "Alhamdulillah" is an Arabic phrase that translates to "Praise be to God" or "Thanks be to God." It is a fundamental expression of gratitude, acknowledging the belief that all aspects of life, even seemingly mundane or routine, are ultimately blessings of God (MacDonald, 2012). Embracing gratitude during tough times showcases their reliance on Allah's divine wisdom and plans. Similarly, the statement regarding Sami's acceptance of reality and his happiness despite challenges suggests resilience and a positive outlook towards life's circumstances. These sentiments reflect a depth of understanding among the participants regarding the complexities of life and the pursuit of contentment. Such reflections contribute to a richer understanding of cultural attitudes towards happiness and well-being within the Jordanian context."

On the other hand, Hungarian narratives do not prominently feature instances of contentment and gratitude, yet these themes do exist, albeit with different emphases. Hungarian narratives tend to show life's imperfections and the pursuit of happiness through diverse means. For instance:

*"Nothing will be perfect, there are going to be obstacles in every part of our lives"*

*"The main character isn't happy in his life, but someone else, who lives similar to him is."*

*"Thomas felt bittersweet relief as he did. Even though his life is yet to be lived, he knew one day it will come to be. Until then, he will chase this haunting dream."*

This perspective does not negate the importance of contentment; rather, it reflects a distinctive cultural outlook in which individuals may perceive and seek happiness in a more individualized manner, highlighting the sentiment of relative happiness and the subjectivity of well-being.

This difference serves as a reminder of the significant role that cultural backgrounds and personal perspectives play in shaping the themes that arise in storytelling. In the context of this study, it is important to recognize and appreciate these differences in the way gratitude and contentment are portrayed, as they offer valuable insights into the distinct values and cultural influences present in the narratives of both groups.

## 5. Conclusion

The study showed the nuances of cultural perspectives through several intriguing similarities and differences between the narratives of Hungarian and Jordanian university students. Both groups had similar attitudes about autonomy, making decisions, and pursuing personal goals, indicating a shared way of thinking. This similarity can be explained by the interconnection of today's world, in which people from different cultures can understand one



another in certain situations, like watching the same silent movie. But despite these similarities, differences appeared in how they saw marriage, relationships, families, gratitude, and the setting of the silent film, which were shaped by their cultural backgrounds. Jordanian narratives, for example, were found to emphasize marriage while avoiding overt references to kissing. They also frequently portrayed bus instead of train as the setting, underscoring how their everyday lives and cultural schemas affected their word choice. These differences and similarities can be useful resources for improving intercultural understanding, communication, and awareness between people from distinct cultures.

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