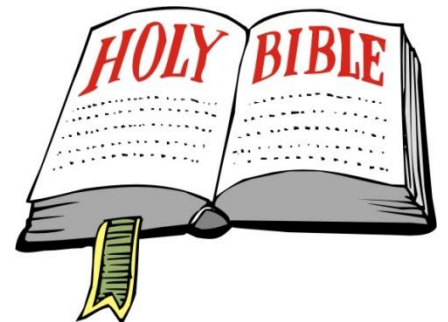


Relevance Theory and Making a Case for the Use of Sacred Texts in Cultural Research

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An Outline

- Research interviews and communication
- The need for 'relevant' texts
- Qualities of sacred texts
- My research design and pilot study

Research Interviews and Communication

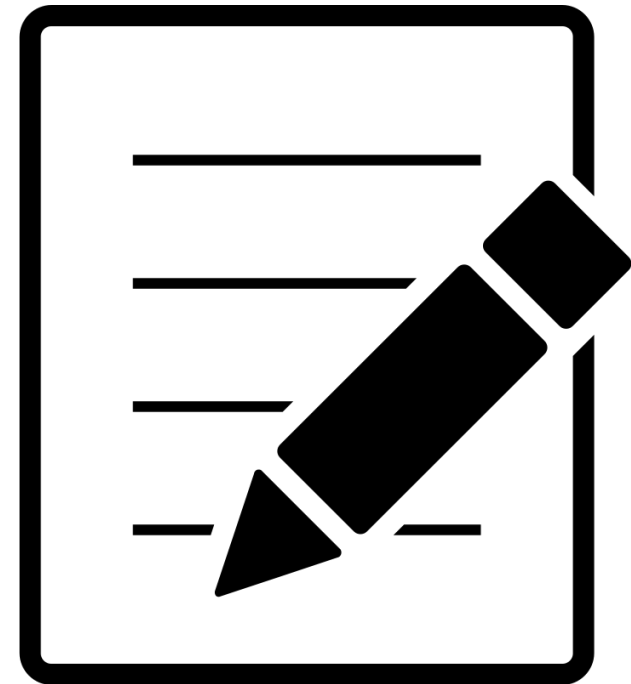
- Catering to the hearer's relevance?

Interrogation?

Casual conversations?

Research Interviews and Communication

- Q. What are the shortcomings of the traditional social research tools (such as questionnaires and interviews)?



Painting Houses!

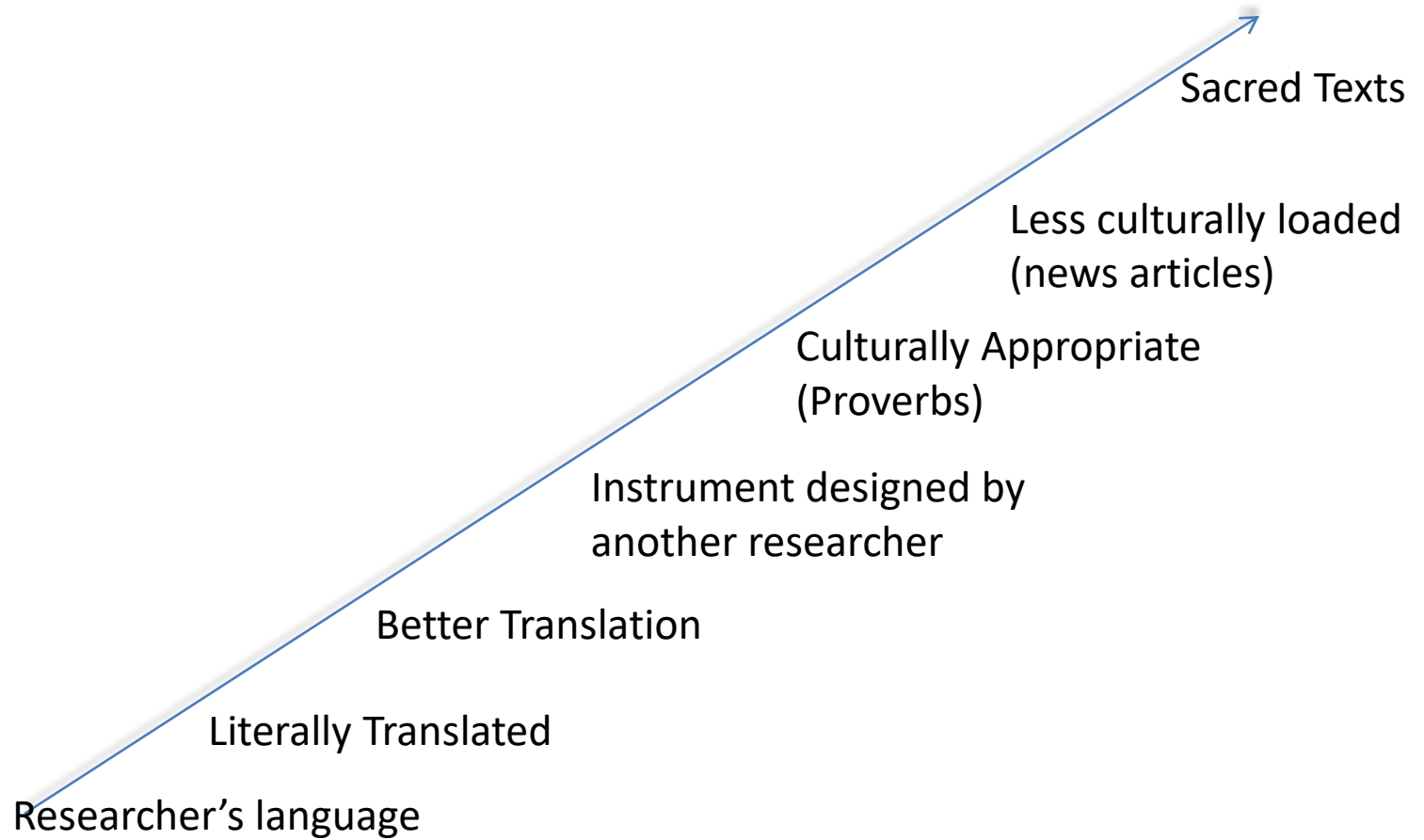
“Would you agree to help your boss paint his house at the weekend if you didn’t want to?”



A neutral text?

“there is no hope that such [nonhuman] instruments can expose anything not built into them by the instrument maker, and what he or she puts in cannot be determined in any other way than on the basis of a priori theory or personal predilection. Such instruments simply cannot reflect the constructions of the respondents, but only of the instrument maker.”
(Lincoln and Guba, 1985:239)

The Need for 'Relevant' Texts



Qualities of Sacred Texts

- Authenticity
- Accessibility

“the greater the amount of processing involved in the formation of an assumption, and the more often it is accessed thereafter, the greater its accessibility.” (Sperber and Wilson, 2004: 77)

- Familiarity of construction

One factor affecting the processing effort exerted by the hearer to interpret the utterance is “the form in which it is presented (audibility, legibility, dialect, register, syntactic complexity and familiarity of construction all affect processing effort).” (Sperber and Wilson, 1998: 9)

Qualities of Sacred Texts

- **Authority** – Subscribed to
- **Accuracy** in translation
- **Universal/Personal** nature
- Covering **a wide range of social issues**
- Targeting audiences in **all classes, genders, age groups**, etc.
- Some **similarities** across holy books

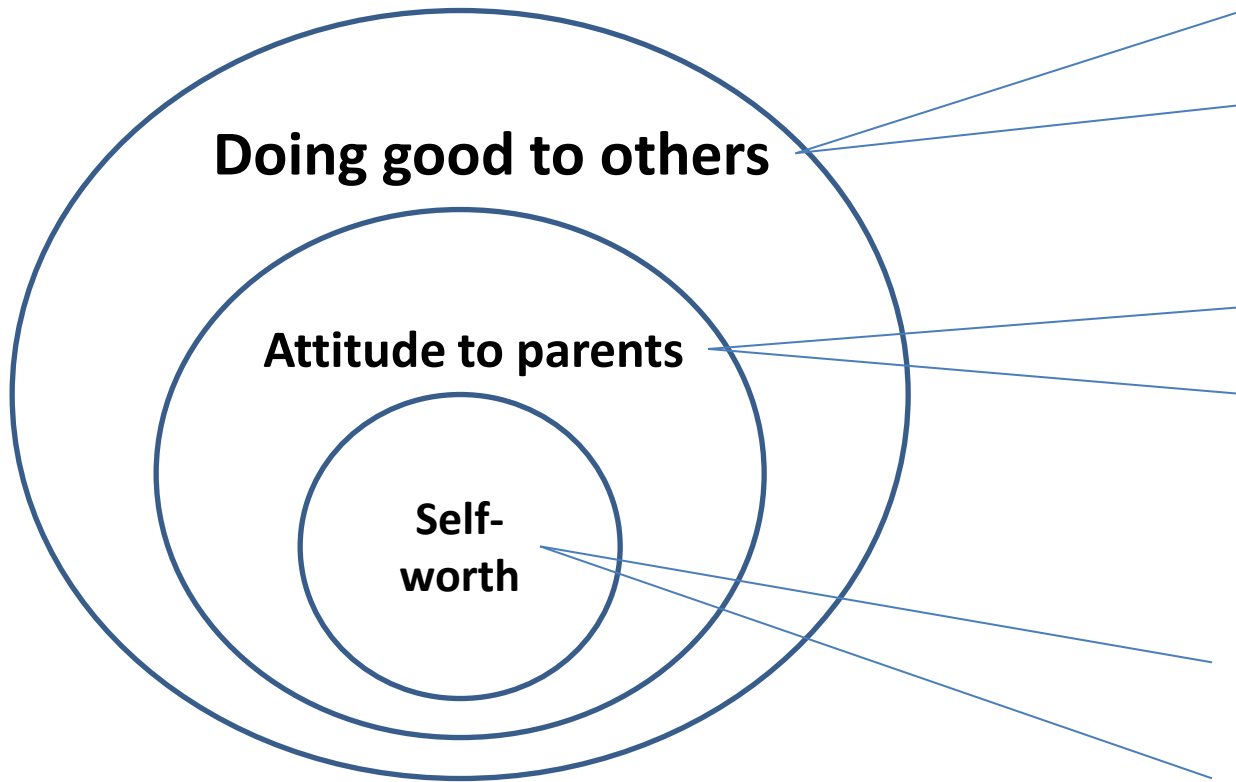
Research Questions

- How are the following perceived in the British and the Egyptian cultures? **Self-worth**, **attitude to parents**, and **doing good to others**.
- What are the advantages and challenges of using sacred texts in cross-cultural research?

Research Design

- Three social themes: Self-worth, attitudes to parents, and doing good to others
- A qualitative study, semi-structured interviews
- Christian/Muslim British/Egyptians (male/female)
- Three sets of Biblical/Qur'anic verses (English/Arabic)
- Every set is a contrasting pair of verses

Research Design



An Example

Exodus 20:12 New International Version (NIV)

**Honor your father and your mother, so that you
may live long in the land the LORD your God is
giving you.**

An Example

Matthew 10:37 New International Version (NIV)

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Concepts – Encyclopaedic Entries

- Concepts in general have three related entries: logical, encyclopaedic, and linguistic. **Encyclopaedic entries** are the ones that carry the various themes related to this concept and it could be those entries that are of interest in a comparative research.
- The differences between the encyclopaedic entries that people have for the same ‘concept’ could tell us about their culture and/or personality.

Domain – Contexts - Concepts

- Using sacred texts in research or in fact in any sort of communication would activate what I can call the ‘domain’ of religion, spirituality, relationship with God, etc.
- This domain is huge; it contains all the knowledge, experiences, and assumptions that one has about God and possibly God-related themes, activities, organisations, writings, people, etc.

Domain – Contexts - Concepts

- Now, this 'domain' will be activated probably once the potential research participant knows about and agrees to take part in the research.
- Then comes the first set of verses which will activate (perhaps within this domain at least initially) a context, for example 'honouring parents'.

Domain – Contexts - Concepts

- The utterance itself will have some ‘concepts’ such as: ‘honour’ your ‘father’ and your ‘mother’. So the concepts ‘honour’, ‘father’, and ‘mother’ are three concepts here that the hearer would retrieve in order to unpack the meaning and answer the question.
- The encyclopaedic entries of each concept may differ from one participant to another and it is in this difference that we as researchers in the social sciences may be interested, because the encyclopaedic entries in the case of concepts will not have to stick to the ‘domain’ activated at the beginning.

Domain – Contexts - Concepts

- Sperber and Wilson believe that hearers can have more than one 'context' active in a parallel fashion.
- This carries the promise that in these encyclopaedic entries of those concepts that we will find some personal, social, professional, cultural, habitual, etc. elements that can shed some light on the different individuals.
- This can lead to some patterns that can be investigated across different groups whether national, professional, age, or gender groups.

Conclusion

- There is a need for research interviews that cater for interviewees' goals and preferences.
- 'Neutral' texts are needed as prompts in interviews.
- 'Sacred texts' can carry a promising potential as universal as well as personal tools in cultural research