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<i>The study of Language</i> by George Yule	المصادر والمراجع
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Background knowledge

Background knowledge refers to the information, experiences, and understanding that a person has prior to encountering new information, which they use to make sense of or interpret new content. It plays a crucial role in comprehension, learning, and communication because it helps individuals interpret and connect new information to what they already know.

In a more formal context, background knowledge can include cultural, social, historical, or academic knowledge that provides a foundation for understanding a specific subject, situation, or piece of communication.

Types of Background Knowledge

1. World Knowledge (General Knowledge)

This includes knowledge about the world, society, and the way things generally work. It could include facts like knowing how the weather works, understanding basic social norms, or having a general awareness of political systems or historical events.

Example: If you're reading an article about climate change, your background knowledge might include basic knowledge about environmental science, human impact on the environment, and recent global warming debates.

2. Cultural Knowledge

This refers to the specific knowledge and understanding you have about the cultural context in which you live or are learning. It can include traditions, values, social practices, and norms specific to a culture.

Example: If you're reading a book from another culture, you might need knowledge of that culture's traditions, language, or historical events to understand certain references or actions in the text.

3. Domain-Specific Knowledge

This is specialized knowledge related to a particular field or subject area, such as science, literature, history, or art. It's often more technical or focused on a specific discipline.

Example: If you are studying a physics textbook, your background knowledge might include basic concepts in physics like Newton's laws of motion, energy, and force.

4. Personal Knowledge

This involves personal experiences, memories, and situations that shape how you interpret and understand new information. Personal background knowledge is unique to each individual and often influences how they react to and process information. ○ Example: Someone who has experienced living in a rural area might have more background knowledge about farming practices than someone who has only lived in an urban setting.

How Background Knowledge Affects Communication and Learning?

1. Enhances Comprehension

When you encounter new information, you are able to relate it to what you already know. The more background knowledge you have, the easier it is to understand new concepts because you can make connections, recognize patterns, and fill in gaps in understanding.

Example: When reading a novel that references historical events, knowing some background about that time period allows you to understand the significance of the events in the story.

2. Facilitates Learning

Background knowledge provides the foundation upon which new information can be built. This is why educators often emphasize the importance of activating prior knowledge before introducing new material in order to make learning more effective.

Example: In a biology class, a teacher may review basic concepts of cell biology before introducing more advanced topics like genetics or cellular respiration to ensure students can build on their existing understanding.

3. Aids Interpretation

When communicating, background knowledge helps individuals interpret implicit meanings, cultural references, and nuanced ideas that might not be explicitly stated. This is particularly important in interpreting metaphors, irony, or indirect speech acts.

Example: If someone says, "It's as hot as an oven in here," your background knowledge of what an oven is (and how hot it can get) allows you to understand the speaker's exaggeration about the temperature.

4. Supports Problem Solving

Having relevant background knowledge helps in solving problems or making decisions. When faced with a challenge, we rely on what we already know to make predictions, evaluate options, and choose solutions.

Example: A mechanic uses their background knowledge of engines and car parts to diagnose problems in a vehicle and suggest repairs.

Background Knowledge in Communication

In communication, background knowledge is essential for both the sender and the receiver of the message to understand and engage in meaningful interaction.

Sender's Perspective: When crafting a message, the sender considers the receiver's likely background knowledge to ensure the message is clear and relevant. This might involve providing context, explaining terms, or framing ideas in ways the receiver can understand based on their experiences or knowledge.

Receiver's Perspective: The receiver brings their own background knowledge to the communication process, which helps them interpret and understand the message. If the sender assumes the receiver has certain background knowledge and doesn't provide enough context, the receiver may misunderstand the message.

Examples of Background Knowledge in Practice

1. In Education:

A student with strong background knowledge in mathematics will find it easier to grasp complex algebraic concepts because they have already learned foundational concepts like arithmetic and basic algebra.

2. In Literature:

When reading a Shakespearean play, background knowledge of Elizabethan society, historical context, or literary conventions of the time can help a reader understand the deeper meanings of the text. For example, knowing the societal norms around marriage can help interpret the relationships between characters.

3. In Conversation:

If two friends are talking about their favorite TV shows, their shared background knowledge about popular culture, specific shows, and characters enables them to communicate effectively. If one person is unfamiliar with the show being discussed, they might struggle to engage fully in the conversation.

Why is Background Knowledge Important for Communication?

Enhances Clarity: When both the sender and receiver share a similar background, communication becomes smoother and more efficient. It allows for the use of fewer explanations or clarifications.

Facilitates Engagement: Background knowledge can make communication more engaging and relevant. When people share knowledge, they connect more easily and communicate more effectively.

Reduces Misunderstanding: Having enough background knowledge prevents misinterpretation of messages. When there's a lack of common background, the message may be misheard or misunderstood, leading to confusion or disengagement.

Conclusion

Background knowledge is the foundation that helps individuals interpret, process, and connect new information. Whether in education, everyday communication, or specialized fields, background knowledge helps bridge the gap between what is known and what is new, enhancing understanding and interaction. It allows us to make sense of the world around us, solve problems, and engage in meaningful conversations.