

Some Cultural Dimensions in Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

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1. Introduction

Many cross-cultural comparisons have been made in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984); Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) to name but a few). I have also conducted cross-cultural studies, comparing between the British and the Japanese in requests and responses to off-record requests (Fukushima, 2000) and comparing among the British, the Japanese and the Swiss in the evaluation of attentiveness (Fukushima, 2004). The analysis of those data among different cultures revealed that some cultural dimensions had to do with the results. Although cultural dimensions are important in the studies of cross-cultural pragmatics, I realized that cultural dimensions have not been fully discussed so far. Therefore, in this paper, I would like to consider some cultural dimensions, namely, individualism-collectivism in section 2, and some other dimensions than individualism-collectivism in section 3.

2. Individualism-Collectivism

In this section, a major cultural dimension, individualism-collectivism is reviewed. First, the characteristics of individualism and collectivism are overviewed in 2.1., and in 2.2., the concept of in-group and out-group, which is deeply connected to individualism-collectivism is reviewed. In 2.3., how to identify individualism-collectivism is summarized. In 2.4., it is claimed that individualist and collectivist features can coexist.

2. 1. Overview

One cultural construct that has received much empirical attention over the past twenty years is individualism-collectivism (I-C) (Tafarodi, et al., 1999: 620). It was proposed by Hofstede (1980; 1991), and developed by Triandis (1994a, b) and Schwartz (1990). There are many scholars who define individualism and collectivism. For example, according to Hofstede (1991: 51), individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in

exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Brislin (1994: 78-79) states that individualists are socialized to be self-reliant and to have more of a sense of separation from their extended family and from their community. They are less likely to invest time and energy if the benefits are to accrue to their group, in contrast to them, personally. The most important distinction between collectivists and individualists is the emphasis placed on the feelings and opinions of group members and the psychological closeness between a person and others. Collectivists are more willing to downplay their own goals in favor of group preferences. They are more likely to be concerned about how their decisions will affect others in their valued groups.

Individualism-collectivism incorporates a host of etic and emic dimensions that account for behavioural variation both within and across cultures (Tafarodi, et al., 1999: 620). Generally, the self in collectivist cultures has been described as enmeshed, ensembled, interdependent, and contextualized. By contrast, the self in individualist cultures has been described as self-contained, isolated, independent, and clearly bounded. This characterization seems to suggest qualitative differences in self-construal as a function of I-C (Tafarodi, et al., 1999: 621).

Triandis, et al. (1986: 266) attempted to extract the pancultural, or etic themes that characterize individualism and collectivism worldwide, and they suggest that Family Integrity and Interdependence with Sociability are important aspects of collectivism, and discriminate across countries.

2. 2. In-group and Out-group

The notion of collectivism and individualism has a lot to do with in-group and out-group. According to Triandis, et al. (1986: 266), the key discriminating factor of individualism is Separation from Ingroups. Tanaka (2004: 22) states that the concept of *uchi* 'inside, in-group' and *soto* 'outside, out-group' is a basic notion that shapes Japanese society. *Uchi* is the self and members of the self. Interactions that occur within the *uchi* domain are intimate and informal. *Soto* interactions take place without-group speakers. This is the formal domain. The boundaries of *uchi/soto* are fluid and in-group or out-group membership changes according to circumstances.

According to Scollon and Scollon (1995: 134), one consequence of the cultural difference between individualism and collectivism has to do with the difference between speaking to members of one's own group and speaking to others. In an individualistic society, groups do not form with the same degree of permanence as

they do in a collectivist society. As a result, the ways of speaking to others are much more similar from situation to situation, since in each case the relationships are being negotiated and developed right within the situation of the discourse. In a collectivist society, many relationships are established from one's birth into a particular family in a particular segment of society in a particular place. These memberships in particular groups tend to take on a permanent, ingroup character along with special forms of discourse which carefully preserve the boundaries between those who are inside members of the group and all others who are not members of the group.

2. 3. Identification

It seems that there are several different ways to identify individualism-collectivism. For example, Hofstede (1991) used individualism index values (IDV) scores, which have been often used to identify some cultures individualist or collectivist. An individualism index scores was low for collectivist and high for individualist societies (Ibid.: 51). The question remains, however, whether the IDV scores always represent the features of individualism and collectivism. Hofstede's data were gathered almost thirty years ago and his survey was concerned only with work goal items. Culture and values are changing and the results obtained thirty years ago may not always hold true now. Culture may not be measured only from work goal items. The results of Fukushima (2004), which dealt with the evaluation of attentiveness, shows that Hofstede's IDV scores may not always represent collectivist and individualist features. If attentiveness is more highly valued in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures, it can be said that the more collectivist the culture is, the more highly attentiveness is valued. According to Hofstede's (Hofstede, 1991: 53) list, Britain is the third in the rank with an IDV score of 89, Switzerland being the fourteenth in the rank with an IDV score of 68, Japan being the 22nd/23rd in the rank with an IDV score of 46. Japanese culture was most collectivist and British culture was most individualist among the three. There was not a positive correlation between the degree of individualist/collectivist features by Hofstede's scores in the above three cultures and the evaluation of attentiveness in every situation investigated (Fukushima, 2004: 377).

Tafarodi, et al. (1999) used self-esteem, which consists of self-competence and self-liking, to identify collectivism and individualism. They used Malaysian university students as the informants from a collectivist culture and British university students as those from an individualist culture. Their results showed that Malaysian students were more collectivist than their British counterparts in some aspects (the tendency to defer to the guidance or direction of relatives, and in regard to feelings of connectedness with parents), but in some other aspects (on the dimension of

confiding in others) Malaysians were less collectivist. That is, Malaysians were not consistently more collectivist than their British counterparts. This suggests that some dimensions are free of the inherent bipolarity of individualist and collectivist.

Tafarodi and Swann (1996) suggested that collectivism and individualism entail inverse costs and benefits for self-esteem. Accordingly, they characterized the influence of I-C on self-valuation as a “cultural trade-off” whereby the same cultural elements that promote the development of one dimension of self-esteem inhibit the development of another (Ibid.: 622). Global self-esteem can be conceived as consisting of two correlated but distinct attitudinal dimensions: self-competence (SC) and self-liking (SL). SL is sensitive to interpersonal feedback expressing approval or disapproval, whereas SC is sensitive to environmental feedback signaling the presence or absence of control and self-determination (Ibid.: 623). With regard to scalar comparisons across cultural groups, this trade-off hypothesis predicts that collectivists should be higher than individualists on the part of SL that is independent of SC, whereas individualists should be higher than collectivists on the part of SC that is independent of SL.

2. 4. Coexistence

Although some features of collectivist and individualist cultures were summarised in the above, it is important to note that these two can coexist. The results by Tafarodi et al. (1999), i.e., Malaysians were not consistently more collectivist than their British counterparts, may be similar to Triandis’s (1986: 260) remark that perhaps collectivism and individualism should not be conceptualized as opposite poles but as two independent factors. It is difficult to dichotomize cultures into collectivist or individualist. From this aspect, we can understand Sinha and Tripathi’s (1994) claim that in Indian culture both collectivist and individualist cultures coexist, although Indian culture is collectivist according to Hofstede (1980).

3. Other Cultural Dimensions

As shown in section 2., individualism-collectivism is the dimension that has been used most often as an explanatory variable. There are, however, some studies which raised some alternative conceptual and operational approach for deriving cultural dimensions of values, which are reviewed in this section.

3. 1. Culture-level Value Types

Having pointed out that there is a historical change after Hofstede’s analyses which

were based on data gathered from 1967 to 1973, and having claimed the need to update the information about the dimensions of cultural variation and the relative positions of different nations on these dimensions, Schwartz (1994: 91) suggested the two following culture level dimensions, consisting of opposing value types, i.e., (1) Autonomy versus Conservatism and (2) Hierarchy and Mastery versus Egalitarian Commitment and Harmony with Nature (Ibid.: 98). Using these, he conducted a survey, gathering data during the 1988-1992 period from 86 samples drawn from 41 cultural groups in 38 nations. Based on 86 samples, he suggested the following culture-level value types: (1) conservatism, (2) intellectual and affective autonomy, (3) hierarchy, (4) mastery, (5) egalitarian commitment and (6) harmony. He explains these values as follows. (1) The culture-level value type, labeled "Conservatism," is constituted precisely of those values likely to be important in societies based on close-knit harmonious relations, in which the interests of the person are not viewed as distinct from those of the group. Cultures that emphasize Conservatism values are primarily concerned with security, conformity, and tradition (Ibid.: 101). (2) Opposite Conservatism are those values likely to be important in societies that view the person as an autonomous entity entitled to pursue his or her individual interests and desires. Two related aspects of Autonomy values, i.e., intellectual and affective autonomy, appear to be distinguishable: a more intellectual emphasis on self-direction and a more affective emphasis on stimulation and hedonism (Ibid.: 102). (3) A distinct region of values that express a preference for Hierarchy emerges closer to Conservatism than to the combined Autonomy index (Ibid.: 103). (4) The values in Mastery emphasize active mastery of the social environment through self-assertion (Ibid.: 103). (5) The values in Egalitarian commitment express transcendence of selfish interests, which emerge opposite to the Hierarchy and Mastery (Ibid.: 104). (6) Harmony means that with nature, which is found opposite Mastery and relates most closely to Egalitarian Commitment (Ibid.: 105).

Based on the analysis of these values, Schwarz (Ibid.: 112-115) provides nation scores on the culture-level value types. He concludes that the culture-level types are appropriate when one seeks to understand how differences between cultures in their symbol systems, institutions, rates and styles of behavior, and so on are related to cultural value emphases (Ibid.: 117).

3. 2. Generation and Education

Mishra (1994: 225) points out that generational differences play an important role in individualist and collectivist orientations. With increasing age, the priorities of life change (Ibid.: 236). According to the survey he conducted using 200 males in India, he found out that higher education appeared to be a significant factor in predicting a

lower level of collectivism and that the residential background affected strongly on the orientation, i.e., the orientation of rural people tended to remain collectivistic despite higher education.

Sinha and Tripathi (1994: 131) maintain that there is a difference in generation in perceiving the family, i.e., among the young there is a distinct trend toward nuclearization, which is a greater individualist orientation.

Yamaguchi (1994: 184) shows that there is a positive correlation between collectivism score and age among the Japanese, who have been considered to be collectivist. He admits that the more affluent the society becomes, the more individualist people become. Because of the Japanese recent substantial economic success, Japanese can now afford to be more individualistic than before. The effects of affluence would likely be most prominent among younger Japanese, because they did not experience the poverty that previous generations endured. He also considers that more democratic education system in Japan after World War II has influenced the more individualistic tendency.

There is a big difference in Japanese education before and after World War II, but the change in education in Japan has also been made recently. Until the mid 1970's, a lot of knowledge has been crammed at schools, but according to the course of study for primary, junior and senior high schools issued by Ministry of Education in 1977, *yutori* [lit. leisure] was important. In the course of study issued in 1989, the guidance according to the individuals was stated. In the course of study issued in 1998, the education to foster individuality was stated (See <http://www.nicer.go.jp/guideline/old>). It can be said that the education in Japan has shifted more to individualism than before. Japanese culture has been said to be collectivist, but the individualist tendency in education has brought some changes to Japanese culture.

As stated above, it is obvious that Japanese culture has changed especially after World War II and in the past twenty years, being more individualistic than before. However, there is also a remark that although many external features of Japanese culture have changed, the core elements of the culture that emphasize human-relatedness remain strong (Kim, 1994: 25). This may suggest that we cannot dichotomize cultures simply into individualist or collectivist. In other words, both individualist and collectivist elements can coexist in one culture, as stated in 2.4.

3. 3. Individual Differences

Kim (1995) claims that it is important to consider also individual-level differences

when considering cultural differences. She (Ibid.: 165) suggests allowing the examination of effects at both individual and culture levels simultaneously. It would be difficult to decide to what extent individual differences should be taken into account when we consider cultural differences, but it is true that even within the same culture there are different values according to the individuals. This may lead to the issue of where the boundary between cultures exists. For example, Thomas (1983: 91) states that she uses the term 'cross-cultural' as a shorthand way of describing not just native-non-native interactions, but *any communication between two people* who, in any particular domain, do not share a common linguistic or cultural background [Italics are mine.]. There may be, therefore, an occasion in which there are cultural differences between two people who belong to the same ethnic group.

4 . Conclusion

The cultural issue is difficult to handle, as it is intangible. There are many different aspects and they are inter-related. How they are inter-related is complex. There may be more cultural dimensions than those reviewed here. The more research into cultural dimensions will be needed, especially when we analyze data among different cultures in cross-cultural pragmatics and investigate the interrelationship between cultural dimensions and the cultural phenomena depicted in the data.

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