

(Sample Debriefing Form – just to get an idea, that’s all!)

Picture Study Debriefing Information

The study you just participated in is part of a cross-cultural study examining English- and Mandarin-speaking adults’ verbal descriptions of both concrete and abstract images. In addition, you were asked to remember the concrete images and a list of words in order to test several hypotheses based on previous findings comparing Mandarin- and English-speakers’ everyday speech and social phenomena.

With regards to speech, Mandarin-speaking children and adults have been found to use a much higher proportion of verbs than nouns in their everyday speech. English-speakers, on the other hand, use relatively fewer verbs than Mandarin-speakers and use a higher proportion of nouns in their everyday speech. Our questions for this study, therefore, were: 1) Will Mandarin- and English-speakers differ in the number of nouns and verbs used for descriptions of the same scenes?; 2) If so, is this because of differences in the language alone, or do Mandarin- and English-speakers choose to focus on different aspects of these scenes (e.g., English-speakers on the objects and Mandarin-speakers on what people are doing with the objects)?; and 3) do these differences magnify when we are asked to remember these scenes and words, or do they disappear?

With regards to social phenomena, Chinese adults and other adults from East Asia have been claimed to have more “collectivistic” societies with a focus on groups and relationships, as opposed to the “individualism” (focus on one’s self and other individuals) found in Anglo-European cultures. Thus, we might expect that the Chinese participants would focus more on people’s social roles and relations, whereas the American participants would focus more on individuals and their attributes. Our question is, can we find evidence for such a difference by looking at people’s descriptions of simple line drawings?

Finally, given the expected differences in language and focus, we were also interested in looking at whether these differences would be more or less prevalent in abstract scenes (e.g., the ink blots you described at the end of the experiment) as opposed to concrete scenes. A very old study conducted by Abel and Hsu (1949), which has been replicated more recently in Taiwan, suggests that people who were born in China were more likely to perceive the inkblots holistically rather than as separate parts.

If this can be replicated and the other results hold true, it suggests that there is some evidence for the notion that there are both cultural and linguistic differences in the ways that Chinese and Americans think and speak, even when they are presented with the very same stimuli. Like all conclusions of this sort, though, one should not take the tendency of the mean to represent all individuals – a mean is just a statistical summary of a group, it does not tell us what individual members of that group may be like.

If you have any further questions about this project, please feel free to contact me, XXXXX (xxx@psy.cuhk.edu.hk), or my research advisor, XXXXX (2609-65xx, xxx@psy.cuhk.edu.hk). Finally, if you would like to receive a summary of the

results of this study, please tell me your address and I will mail you a summary at the conclusion of the experiment.

Further Readings:

Abel, T.M., & Hsu, F.L.K. (1949). Some aspects of personality of Chinese as revealed by the Rorschach Test. Rorschach Research Exchange Journal and Journal of Projective Technique, 13, 285-301, available at the undergraduate reserve desk.

Bond, M.H. (Ed., 1986). The psychology of the Chinese people. New York: Oxford University Press.

Markus, H.R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. Psychological Review, 98, 224-253.

Tardif, T. (in press). Nouns are not always learned before verbs: Evidence from Mandarin Chinese. To appear in Developmental Psychology, available at the undergraduate reserve desk.