

Understanding Individualism and Collectivism at Gekidan Shiki

The purpose of this study is to use the connection between language and culture to examine individualism and collectivism through musicals in modern day Japanese society. As Western musicals have grown in popularity over the past few decades in Japan, musicals are an interesting medium to examine this dynamic as Gekidan Shiki is a place where not only language and culture intersect, but also Western and Japanese culture intersect. Because language and culture are connected, musicals can be used as a medium to examine culture, specifically individualism and collectivism in Japan, since in recent years due to Westernization, how Japan should be ranked has become more and more ambiguous. A content analysis, examining the English lyrics and the Japanese lyrics of *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, and *The Little Mermaid*, was performed with both quantitative and qualitative components. The number of frequencies of individualism and collectivism in each musical in each respective language observed was tabulated. The results showed that individualism was maintained, but collectivism was maintained as well, which could show that Japanese culture has become more receptive towards individualism. However, since the demeanor of a Japanese person is still maintained, it shows that while Japan is more accepting of individualism, they still want their culture to stay somewhat intact.

Literature Review

Western musical theatre in Japan has become increasingly popular since the late 20th Century (Brandon). Gekidan Shiki, one of the most popular Western-style theatres in modern-day Japan, holds over 3,000 performances per year of Japanese versions of Western musicals such as *The Sound of Music* and *Chorus Line* (“Shiki Theatre Company”). The theatre strives to promote cultural exchange by working with foreign staff and using outside resources as well as their own in order to bring these musicals to the Japanese stage (“Shiki Theatre Company”).

Disney® theatrical productions are some of the most popular musicals at Gekidan Shiki, as these musicals have already had prior exposure due to the popularity of Disney movies. Additionally, Gekidan Shiki is currently the only theatre in Japan that has the rights to put on these large-scale Disney productions. While there are plenty of Disney productions that have

passed the Broadway stage, Gekidan Shiki has only performed five: *Beauty and the Beast* (1995); *Lion King* (1998); *Aida* (2013); *The Little Mermaid* (2013); and *Aladdin* (2015) (“Shiki Theatre Company”). However, only four of the musicals (excluding *Aida*) are currently playing in Japan. As *Aladdin* translator Chitoge Takahashi discusses in an interview, translating these musicals from the original Broadway productions to one suitable for Japanese audiences is not as simple as translating each individual word, especially when it involves singing, orchestration, choreography, and adaptation for Japanese audiences. In order to examine the translation process in musicals, it is important to first examine what the language means, how it connects to culture, and how it relates specifically to the Japanese culture.

Hubert Alexander, author of *Language and Logic of Philosophy*, defines language as an “activity” that allows for the analysis of thoughts, ideas, impressions, and a person’s other “mental stock in trade.” It is a verbal way to express one’s thoughts, which, according to the Whorfian hypothesis, states that language influences the way one perceives the world. American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf believed that language completely determines thought. Whorf may not have been entirely correct in stating that language *completely* determines thought, but Alexander asserted that he was not wrong in establishing that there is a correlation between the two. Language does influence thought, and thought, language -- even if neither has a complete influence over the other (Alexander).

Alexander agrees with Whorf that language influences thought, but he more importantly uses Whorf’s hypothesis to establish that there is an implied relation between language, thought, and culture. The problem with this commonly accepted hypothesis is the fact that it is difficult to prove a direct correlation between language and thought. The only aspect linguists seem to be

able to prove is that language somehow implicitly shapes our thoughts (Alexander). Because of this, many linguists accept that there is some implicit connection between language, thought, and culture.

Culture encompasses a variety of different ideas, which makes it difficult to explicitly define. A common definition used in “classical anthropology” states that culture seems to be “a distinctive, integrated, relatively consistent set of habits and rules” (Bennett). Additionally, David Matsumoto, author and psychologist at the University of San Francisco, says that the culture reflects a variety of more specific aspects such as tradition, history, attitudes, values, practices, heritage, and customs.

Gekidan Shiki can be seen as a place where this unclear connection can be further studied, because of the presence of a clear intersection between language and culture. Musicals shown at this theatre must be translated from English to Japanese, so in the Japanese translations, the musicals themselves could highlight the Japanese culture in an intriguing way. While the language is Japanese, the play stays true to the original Western plot. The question that initially arises is, which culture is more clearly represented by the final musical product -- Japanese or American -- or are both present but intertwined?

An intriguing cultural difference that can be examined through this tension of translation, and tied in to the see whether Western or Japanese values are more present post-translation of the musicals Gekidan Shiki shows, is that between cultural individualism and collectivism. Japan has typically been categorized as a collectivist society, in contrast to America’s individualistic one (Brightman). However, since the early 21st Century, there has been debate about whether Japan’s society remains collectivist. The controversy seems to be due to the increased Westernization in

Japan sparked by American occupation in Japan after World War II (Naofusu). Currently, Westernization seems inherent throughout much of Japanese culture. The JET Program, for example, an initiative promoted by the Japanese government, even imports native English speakers to teach English in Japanese schools, providing a more immersive language learning experience (“History”). Additionally, the government is still trying to increase the presence of English curricula and encourage more inter-cultural awareness before the 2020 Olympics, which will be held in Tokyo (“English Education”). Because of this Westernization, the two cultures have mixed together, leaving many researchers wondering where Japan stands culturally. Looking at this through the connection between language, culture, and the translation process could provide a new perspective to the debate. However, individualism and collectivism must first be properly defined.

Individualism and collectivism are two ideas that are used to categorize different cultures. Researchers Gorodnichenko and Roland at the University of California Berkeley state that individualism encourages personal freedom, achievement, and one’s individual goals in society. Collectivism, however, emphasizes one’s place in a larger group like a nation, often promoting conformity (Gorodnichenko and Roland). Evidently, these definitions are overly broad; in order to look deeper at collectivism and individualism, they must be compared in smaller categories. There are a variety of ways that these two cultural conceptions can be broken into groups, but through extensive preliminary research, it was found that there are three broad and common categories used to compare individualism and collectivism: group or self orientation, responsibility, and discussion.

A nation's orientation to a group or one's self is the largest factor that determines whether the culture is individualist or collectivist. In individualistic cultures, each person is seen as an individual unit separate from others, pursuing their own personal goals and self-enhancement (Leake & Black). Because of this, America is categorized as an individualistic culture, as studies like Matsumoto's "Changing Patterns of Individualism and Collectivism in the United States and Japan" have shown through proportional variance analysis that Americans function for themselves.

On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, individuals are seen as interdependent within a larger group (Leake & Black). Everything an individual does affects the greater good of the nation, and his goals are pursued for family, business, or country. Japan has typically been classified as a collectivist culture, because traditionally, its citizens have felt a strong sense of orientation to nation and family rather than themselves (Matsumoto, Wierzbicka). Because of these two different mindsets of individualism and collectivism, responsibility is very different in both cultures. People in individualistic cultures put personal responsibility above all else while collectivist cultures put their social responsibility such as obligation to family or country above their own personal responsibilities (Leake & Black).

Individualistic cultures tend to promote discussion and the sharing of opinions both in schools and in the workplace (Leake & Black). Collectivist cultures, however, look down upon sharing opinions and thus put decision-making in the hands of superiors. Researcher Anna Wierzbicka, a Polish linguist currently working at the Australian National University in Canberra, gives an example of this scenario when explaining "cultural scripts," described as a set of words and conversations that naturally happens in everyday life within the Japanese language.

In her example, she describes a very common situation in Japan by giving a hypothetical of an American businessman working for a Japanese firm. He is disappointed by the staff meeting because while many people agreed with the proposed idea by the boss, no one evaluated the pros and cons or even discussed their opinions on the product. This situation shows how the Japanese avoid discussion and leave the decisions in the hands of their leader. If their boss likes the idea, most of the group will vote for it without questioning the downfalls.

However, in recent years, many researchers believe that Japanese society is significantly less collectivist than it was in the past. At California Polytechnic State University, researchers Kobayashi, Kerbo, and Sharp conducted a study in which they asked, “Do Japanese college students truly exhibit ‘collectivist’ tendencies in comparison with American college students?” (Kobayashi, Kerbo, and Sharp). These researchers used a questionnaire with a seven-point scale asking students to rank how significantly specific identified collectivist and individualist values guided their lives. The method was developed by author and professor of communication William B. Gudykunst, who has done similar work as Kobayashi, Kerbo, and Sharp to measure the orientation of individualism and collectivism. They found that Japanese college students are less collectivist than American college students, which rebuked the general stereotype that all Japanese people were collectivist because this younger generation of college students in Japan are less collectivist. However, they also found that Japan is less individualist than American college students. This shows that on the scale of where the extremes are individualism and collectivism, this younger group of Japanese college students are less collectivist than previous generations of college students. However, they are not quite as individualist as America. Although this study was for individuals, specifically college students, it shows how people now

view collectivism and individualism as a scale where countries can lean towards one or the other, or even be in the middle. The very fact that a scale was used shows that there are gradations that are much more nuanced than the two constructed categories.

However, Bernard Saint-Jacques, Ph.D in communication and linguistics at University of British Columbia Emeritus, brings up an important point. In a review on Matsumoto's research that debunks the idea that Japan is collectivist, he fully agrees with Matsumoto's thought on Japan is no longer collectivist. However, while he notes that Japanese collectivism is breaking down and individualism is infiltrating, he notes that this shift seems apparent only in the younger generation. He takes important note of a new idea coined by Matsumoto called "individual collectivism" in which people celebrate individual values while still valuing key traditional values. This is important because in recent studies such as the study by Kobayashi, Kerbo, and Sharp, individualism and collectivism are viewed as a scale on which people can lean towards individualism or collectivism or be somewhere in between. If individuals can be viewed on this spectrum, then looking at cultures similarly could be an indication of whether Japan is more individualistic, collectivist, or in the middle, which would exemplify this new concept of "individual collectivism."

Because of Western musical theatre's popularity in the modern day, examining the lyrics of the Disney musicals could give more insight to how Japan exhibits individualism or collectivism. Wierzbicka establishes in her discussion of "cultural scripts," that culture can be seen through a nation's language and everyday communication. These "scripts" exemplify societal customs and actions through communication in everyday life, showing an implicit connection between language and culture, because they are expressly linguistic. So, when a

translator translates musical lyrics into her native language, Japanese, the lyrics are also going to exhibit some Japanese cultural traits that are inseparably linked to the language.

When discussing these Disney musicals and their popularity in Japan, it may prove insightful to look at them through our discussion of language and culture's connection. Disney musicals tend to show more American, individualistic ideals. For example, Ariel's individual goal is to be human and live on land with Prince Eric. Thus, she deliberately disobeys her father as a means to her end, showing the independence Ariel feels at this moment in her life, which is one of the defining traits of individualism (Leake & Black). However, the Japanese language itself, as Wierzbicka states, is still somewhat collectivist -- with certain words and phrases that heavily suggest deference and responsibility to a larger community. For example, Wierzbicka gives examples such as the one of the business meeting and others that exhibit Japanese indecisiveness because they rely on superiors for decision-making. So it seems that when translated, Gekidan Shiki's musicals are stuck somewhere between individualism and collectivism.

Gekidan Shiki's *Aladdin* translator Takahashi discusses in her interview that she not only has to take culture into account, but also all the aspects of the production as well. The Japanese language tends to have a lot more syllables than English does, making it difficult to still make direct translations and match the beats in the music. Additionally, because the dances are the same as those on Broadway, there is less leeway as there is in music for the words to match the notes. This additional factor of staying true to the original music and dance limits the examination of cultural collectivism and individualism, because Japanese words are not chosen to carefully represent the scenes in a culturally familiar light, and instead are squeezed and

moved around to stay true to the original plot; however, interesting differences *inherent* in the Japanese language would not be erased in this modification process and could still show insight on cultural differences.

This leads to the question, “How do the translated Japanese lyrics in comparison to the original versions of Disney musicals maintain individualistic traits or exhibit collectivist traits?” Exploring this tug-of-war dynamic is not only important to raising awareness about the importance and rising influence of musical theatre in Japan, but also to further investigating the connection between language and culture. This research may even provide some insight to new ideas about individualism and collectivism such as Matsumoto’s “individual collectivism,” and establish whether such divisions exist anymore in our increasingly globalizing world.

Methods

A content analysis of the translated lyrics of the Disney musicals *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, and *The Little Mermaid* was conducted with both a quantitative and qualitative component. These musicals were chosen because, out of the five Disney musicals that have played in Japan (the fifth being *Aida*), these particular musicals all have movies that preceded them, which means they have the previous exposure and popularity that *Aida* does not. Additionally, these are the only Disney musicals currently playing at Gekidan Shiki.

In each analysis, the Japanese and the original English lyrics were examined. Though there are many ways to code lyrics into specific categories, this research used descriptive coding, a method of parsing linguistic cues and sentence structure for underlying meaning, ideas, and behaviors, to look for individualistic characteristics and collectivistic characteristics (Gibbs, Clarke, & Taylor).

Leake and Black provide a side-by-side chart comparing traits of individualism and collectivism as seen in Table 1. This chart was used throughout the examination of the lyrics to ascertain correspondence to various traits of individualism and collectivism. This specific chart was chosen because these traits are so commonly accepted to define individualism and collectivism, and most of the traits listed are listed by many other researchers such as Anna Wierzbicka and David Matsumoto. Through analysis, the more prominent or less prominent traits that arose in the text were observed and noted.

Table 1: Individualism vs. Collectivism

Collectivist Values	Individualistic Values
Interdependence	Independence
Obligation to Others	Individual rights
Rely on group	Self-sufficiency
Adhere to tradition	True to own values
Maintain tradition	Progress
Fulfill group roles	Pursue individual goals
Group achievement	Individual achievement
Competition between groups	Competition between individuals
Hierarchical decision-making	Self-determination
Shame due to failing group	Shame due to individual failure
Living with kin	Independent living
Objects valued for social uses	Objects valued for technological uses

Source: Leake, D., & Black, R. (2005). *Essential tools: Cultural and linguistic diversity: Implications for transition personnel*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.

The English lyrics were coded for any individualistic or collectivist traits, and each

tabulation of individualism or collectivism was noted in Table 2. Afterwards, the same was done for the Japanese lyrics. In addition, a side-by-side comparison was then done to look for differences between the original English lyrics and their translations. This allowed me to see not only which traits were apparent between the two versions of the musical, but if certain traits changed or became more or less apparent when translated into Japanese. This process was used for each musical.

However, performing a content analysis poses certain problems. Siegfried Kracauer, German writer and cultural critic, says that the largest problem with qualitative content analysis specifically is that it relies on human judgement. The analysis itself may become imprecise and highly subjective based on the individual performing the content analysis. If this occurs, bias will overshadow the study. I sought to do this by coding the content analysis in a very precise and structured way by using the chart of traits so that all the analyses are consistent.

In order to account for these possible errors, intra-reader validity must be accounted for. Mackey and Gass, *Doctors in Applied Linguistics* and researchers, discuss intra-reader validity in great depth in their paper "Second language research: Methodology and design." Whether a person is conducting a quantitative or qualitative content analysis, intra-reader validity needs to be accounted for in order to make sure their results are consistent. In order to personally check for intra-reader validity, songs were randomly selected from each musical and re-coded to check that the coding is consistent with the first coding. Because content analyses can be so subjective, intra-reader validity allows one to personally check himself to make sure he is coding consistently and without bias. This improves validity, thus improving the quality of the coding as well.

Results

The original question explored how the translated Japanese lyrics in comparison to the original versions of Disney musicals either maintain individualistic traits or exhibit collectivist traits. In conducting the content analysis, Table 1, adapted from Leake & Black, was used to first distinguish traits between whether they were individualism or collectivism. After distinguishing which they fell under, they were then categorized more specifically by traits, such as those presented in Table 1. I first used the more specific categories. However, there was no change exhibited, so I moved towards looking at the more general categories to see more broadly how individualism and collectivism was maintained or changed.

Table 2: Individualism and Collectivism in English and Japanese versions of Disney musicals

	Aladdin		Beauty and the Beast		The Lion King		The Little Mermaid		Totals	
	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C
English	49	47	62	21	47	49	98	15	256	132
Japanese	44	43	60	22	39	49	79	15	222	129

* Key: I= Individualism; C= Collectivism

The initial hypothesis predicted that the musicals would maintain some of their original individualistic traits, but would exhibit more collectivistic traits in the Japanese versions because of the inherent collectivism in the Japanese language. However, in actuality, the results showed that individualism was maintained, but collectivism was maintained as well. The amount of collectivism in the Japanese lyrics did not in fact increase in translation due to the inherent collectivism in the Japanese language, as previously stated by Wierzbicka.

Presence of Individualism

The total values of the English lyrics contained 256 instances of individualism and the Japanese lyrics had 222 instances of individualism. One may conclude from this that there was a significant change from the English to Japanese lyrics. However, while the amount may be different, the individualistic goals are maintained. For example, in the English *Beauty and the Beast* musical, Belle talks about her goal of wanting more than her small town life by saying:

*“I want much more than this provincial life.
I want adventure in the great wide somewhere.
I want it more than I can tell.
And for once it might be grand
To have someone understand
I want so much more than they’ve got planned.”*

In the English she explains the same sentiment, saying:

“もっと大きな夢いが
いつかどこかに行きたい
この町の外へ
私の夢を叶えてくれる
素敵な世界なの”
(“I have a bigger dream
Someday I want to take a journey
Outside this town
Where my dream becomes true
Splendid world outside”)

As one can see, the Japanese version is more concise, which could lead to it having less tabulations. However, the ideas behind it such as her dream to leave her small town life remains the same throughout both the English and Japanese versions. This suggests that while the language changes, the way characters express their goals remains the same. The simple fact that the same individualistic ideas were maintained through the character’s goals as opposed to

replacing it with more collectivist values is an important observation that, which, although not expected, is meaningful.

Presence of Collectivism

The same amount of collectivism was exhibited in both the English and Japanese versions. Unlike the original hypothesis predicted, there was no increase in the amount of collectivism observed in the Japanese lyrics. The collectivism in both remains the same, appearing mainly as forms of obligation to others and fulfilling one's role. For example, *Aladdin's* Jasmine describes fulfilling her role as princess saying:

*"A princess must say this
A princess must marry a total stranger
It's absurd"*

In the Japanese version she explains the same sentiment:

*“王女たるもの、こういう話し方をすべきだ、
こういう格好をすべきだ、
そして、会ったこともないどこかの王子と結婚すべきだ、って”*
(“The princess must speak this way,
The princess must wear that way...
Must marry a prince from somewhere
Who I never meet...”)

Based on this instance, it is observed that the lyrics' intentions were not changed to reflect Japan's traditionally collectivist culture. Although Wierzbicka says that the Japanese language has aspects of it that are inherently collectivist; the way the character's goals, personalities, and actions are expressed in the musicals are not changed to be more collectivist.

Discussion

Matsumoto and Alexander both discuss the connection between language and culture, agreeing that no one really knows how the two are connected, but there is definitely proof that

there is an implicit connection. Musicals are an intersection between both American and Western culture and language and culture. Therefore, musicals were analyzed in order to gain some insight about this phenomenon. The original question explored how the translated Japanese lyrics in comparison to the original versions of Disney musicals maintain individualistic traits or exhibit collectivist traits. The original hypothesis predicted that because of the inherent collectivism in the Japanese language, as stated by Anna Wierzbicka, there would be more collectivism present in the Japanese versions of the musicals than the English. However, the results showed that there was no significant difference between the amount of individualism and collectivism maintained in both the English and Japanese versions of the musical lyrics. Based on this instance, it is observed that the lyrics' intentions were not changed to reflect Japan's traditionally collectivist culture. Since Gekidan Shiki musicals are a medium depicting the implicit connection between language and culture, the maintenance of individualistic traits in these musical lyrics suggests that Japanese culture is becoming accepting of individualistic values.

While it seems the lyrics were not changed drastically to fit traditional Japanese collectivism, there were some key differences between the Japanese and English versions of the musical that suggested that the Japanese versions depict more of the demeanour of a Japanese person. Anna Wierzbicka discusses the strong portrayal of Japanese culture through the language, and in doing so, touches upon some of the characteristics of this demeanour. These include their apologetic nature, willingness to accept blame, self-effacement, and non-expression of wants or opinions.

In the *Little Mermaid*, the English version, Ariel says “it’s like my life was wrong,” implying that she does not like her life under the sea. However, in the Japanese version, Ariel says, “海の底もいいところ(it is good below the sea),” which is in complete contrast with the English version. This depicts more of the demeanor of a Japanese person, as Wierzbicka discusses, and their unwillingness to share their negative opinions. In the Japanese version, instead of degrading the sea, Ariel rather how she wants to explore the world above. Another example in *Beauty and the Beast* is when the enchantress appears in the beginning. In the English version, the servants are turned into enchanted objects simply for being in the same castle as the prince. However, in the Japanese version, more emphasis is placed on the servants for raising the prince and teaching him how to act, and thus, due to this, they are changed into enchanted objects as well .

It was originally thought that when Wierzbicka was discussing this concept, she meant that collectivism was inherent in the Japanese language. By making these slight changes to the musical lyrics, it could possibly make it easier for people to accept the individualism in the musical, because they can relate to the demeanor of the character, even though the actions are more individualistic. The accepting of more individualism throughout Japan along with maintaining key characteristics of their culture could suggest that while the Japanese are accepting of Westernization, they still want certain aspects of their culture to be kept intact. This can be supported by David Matsumoto’s “individual collectivism,” in which people celebrate individualistic values while still valuing key traditional values, like their demeanour that has remained constant in their language and culture over the years (Saint-Jacques, Matsumoto, Wierzbicka) .

The results of this research, however, present certain errors that may impact the reliability of the characterization of individualistic and collectivist traits. One possible error is due to the difficulty in directly translating the English language to the Japanese language. Japanese grammar is very different than English grammar, making it difficult to translate (Elliot, Maeda). Additionally, there are many words in the Japanese language that do not have English translations. For example, Wierzbicka says “amae,” “enryo,” “wa,” “on,” “giri,” and “seishi” are all words that are at the core of Japanese culture and are frequently used in everyday life, but they cannot be directly translated. A second possible error is due to the Japanese language being more syllabic. In shaping the translated Japanese lyrics to the same Disney music, the Japanese lyrics inherently become more concise, which could have also attributed to fewer tabulations in the Japanese lyrics.

This research is based on interpretation from the results collected from the content analysis, and more research would have to be done to further support this research and to gain more insight into the maintenance of culture through musical lyrics. For musicals specifically, onsite research involving interviewing audience members to gain a second-hand perspective could see how the musicals are actually perceived by the people. This could help gain insight to whether the Japanese are accepting of all the individualistic values presented in the musicals and if they see any of their own culture represented in the musical.

However, musicals are just a minute subsection of Japanese culture, and in order to further show this “individual collectivism” in Japanese culture, where Japan is becoming more accepting of individualism but maintaining their own traditional culture, more representative samples, such as other works like books, poems, and songs or other literature, would need to be

used. Despite these limitations, the implications of this study still provide a valuable understanding of the Japanese's beliefs about their culture. Since there is a connection between language and culture, the musicals provide insight on Japan's growing acceptance of individualism. However, they do not fully subscribe to an individualistic way of living because they still want to maintain parts of their own culture. This observation, while minute on a large scale, indicates a potential shift in global culture resulting from Westernization.

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