

Attachment 3

Linguistic Variances Associated with Psychological Growth: Effect of Collectivistic and Individualistic Climates

Social Psychology

Abstract

The incidence of traumatic events is inexorably connected to the history of the human experience. Although past research has concentrated its efforts on evaluating the negative reactions resulting from a stressful life event, burgeoning data is revealing that individuals can also exhibit psychological growth in the aftermath of trauma (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Furthermore, cross-cultural studies indicate that societies may not necessarily define growth in analogous ways (Kobayashi, Schallert and Ogren, 2003). Thus, the purpose of this study is to assess what type of image individuals from different cultures hold in association with the term, “personal growth.” Specifically, this study seeks to investigate whether any linguistic disparities confirm or challenge the belief that these variations reflect the individualistic and collectivistic cultural climate of America and Japan, respectively. We hypothesize that when American high school students are voluntarily prompted to provide an open-ended description to the word, “personal growth,” their answers will differ from their Japanese counterparts in lexical category (noun, adjective, adverb, preposition, etc.) and language style (concrete vs. abstract), ultimately coinciding with a more individualistic cultural perspective. Conversely, Japanese high school students will show a greater predilection towards language conveying a more collectivistic, less individualistic attitude. High schools students from America ($n = 147$) and Japan ($n = 374$) were recruited to voluntarily respond to a set of inventories and provide open-ended answers to the

question, “What are the three words you think about when hearing the word, ‘personal growth.’”

All of the responses were coded twice by different team-members and subsequently arranged into 6 subcategories. Responses were even further divided based on whether the word represented an individualistic or collectivistic overtone and/or undertone. Preliminary results show that American high school students chose words with an individualistic connotation more often than their Japanese counterparts, e.g. “you” vs. “family,” and that such words were more often self-referential, abstract nouns (see table 1), matching cross-cultural expectations.

Advancing research on this topic is critical as it elucidates the need for more effective and perhaps, more tailored methods of assessing growth among various cultural groups, especially beneficial in today’s society of amalgamated educational and professional environments.

References

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Table 1

Example of Responses Associated with “Personal Growth”

Nation	Response	LC	LS
United States			
	Independence	n	Abstract
	Maturity	n	Abstract
	Growing	adj.	Abstract
	You	n	Concrete
	Proudness	n	Abstract
Japan			
	Heart	n	Abstract
	Family	n	Concrete
	Helpful to others	v	Concrete
	Duty as daughter	v	Abstract
	Compassion	n	Abstract

Note: LC = Lexical category; LS = Language style; n = Noun; adj. = Adjective; v = Verb