Analyses of Personal Attitude Construct in Interpersonal Relations in Japan and Malaysia

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The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the schema of interpersonal relationships in a multiracial nation. A schema of interpersonal relations, especially the common cultural part of it, is subtle and implicit. When we come into contact with a foreigner, we notice cultural differences. Similarly, a member of a minority group is strongly conscious of the differences among subcultures. The second aim of this study was to confirm the effectiveness of personal attitude construct (PAC) analysis, for measuring an interpersonal schema, especially in a multiracial nation. In Malaysia, native Malaysians are the majority and have privileges such as favorable ratios for entrance into national universities and employment at companies. Our participant was a Chinese Malaysian international female student at a Japanese university. The results revealed that the schema about Japanese was the same as in previous well-known studies, but the schema about Malaysian interpersonal relationships exhibited peculiar characteristics that contain conflicts among races and strive for integration. The participant feels inequity as a Chinese Malaysian, for she thinks that being Malaysian has advantages. However, she concludes that Malaysians need "harmonious exchange beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds" and should "endeavor to integrate people as (totally) Malaysian." Comparing the result of a PAC analysis about Malaysian interpersonal relationships with the Japanese result, we were able to describe the characteristics of the cognitive construct in a multiracial nation.

Key words: schema of interpersonal relationships, minority group, analysis of personal attitude construct

All of us, in our everyday lives, have theories about ourselves and the surrounding social world. Our theories about the world are called schemas (Bartlett, 1932; Markus, 1977; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). A schema of interpersonal relationships is so naturally embedded in our social lives that we are hardly aware of it.

Schemas are developed as a result of encounters or abstract communication about related general characteristics. When people generalize a schema from experience, it typically becomes more abstract. The critical shift to abstraction may occur after only two exposures, at which point people begin to perceive commonalities between the two experiences. The more one knows, the more one can describe the details of the schema. Schemas also become more tightly organized as they develop. As schemas develop and are unitized with practice, they take up less mental capacity, thus freeing one to attend to other matters. For a person to function adaptively, added knowledge must increasingly fit the stimulus world, at least well enough, if not perfectly. According to Fiske & Taylor (1991), the cognitive frame of interpersonal relationships is a schema that powerfully indicates how to behave in a situation. We do not typically recognize the existence of interpersonal relationship schemas: they are subtle, implicit, and carried out automatically.

In contrast, when we come into contact with a foreigner, we notice cultural differences between the two interpersonal relationship schemas.

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When we try to apply our social schemas to foreign people, we may become angry or puzzled at their protests or rejection. The use of maladapted schema can be costly, so it behooves us to be alert to the possibility of being wrong. We may even change our schemas. When we have difficulty with a person from another country, we mainly use a subtyping model because we can easily perceive that person as foreign. Similarly, a member of a minority group is strongly conscious of the differences among subcultures.

We Japanese do not easily recognize our schemas of interpersonal relationships. However, when students from abroad encounter the Japanese culture and style of interpersonal relationships, they may experience culture shock. Watanabe (2002) suggested that culture shock is a schema shock from the standpoint of cognitivism. International students at Japanese universities confront many different standards and styles of Japanese interpersonal behavior and may even experience a mental health crisis (Ohashi, 2008). However, they gradually become accustomed to Japanese standards and styles, and at the same time obtain and develop a schema of Japanese interpersonal relationships. Thus, foreign students are appropriate subjects for investigating Japanese interpersonal relationships. Foreign subjects easily notice differences, but they are hardly cognizant of the underlying schema. Because a schema is subtle and implicit, it is necessary to have a technique for assembling and constructing information about it. Recently, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz (1998) created the implicit association test (IAT) to measure implicit attitudes (e.g., prejudice), or the implicit association between concepts and attributes (e.g., race). However, it is not suitable for measuring a structure (construct) of various personal association items. Because a schema is fundamentally a personal cognitive framework, a personal measurement such as personal attitude construct (PAC) analysis (Naito, 1993, 1997, 2002) is more appropriate. PAC analysis involves a subject's free association and interpretation. It is suitable for the discovery of factors, and it is used for a single case.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the schema of interpersonal relationships in a multiracial nation and to confirm the suitability of PAC analysis for measuring such a schema. The Chinese are well known as people with whom we must negotiate (e.g., Lucian, 1992). The Chinese and Japanese differ greatly in terms of flexibility, groupism (collectivism), virtue, privacy, reliability, manners, and intimacy (Leung & Inoue, 2003; Nakamura, 2002; Ri, 2005; Sueda, 1995). Thus, a Chinese international student encounters many difficulties when negotiating with the Japanese, and easily notices differences in interpersonal behavior. Naito (2009) revealed that a Chinese student in Japan acquires Japanese interpersonal schema unconsciously and confirmed the suitability of PAC analysis for measuring such a schema. One multiracial nation is Malaysia, where Chinese Malaysians are a minority group. In Malaysia, native Malaysians are the majority and have privileges such as favorable ratios for entrance into national universities and employment at companies. A Chinese Malaysian international student would feel some degree of differences from the characteristics of interpersonal relations of "total" Malaysians. Thus, a Chinese Malaysian international student was selected as a subject.

METHOD

Participant

The subject was a female Chinese Malaysian international student who was a sophomore at a Japanese university. Her parents are both of Chinese origin. She talks with her mother in Chinese and with her father in English.

Procedure

The entire procedure was conducted in the Japanese language. First, the researcher outlined the method of PAC analysis to the subject and informed her that she could cancel her participation in the study whenever she wanted. The researcher requested her permission to report her data to an academic meeting and in a journal, provided that the researcher protected her privacy.

(1) *Association items*

The researcher then presented the following stimulus sentences for free association, reading

them aloud to the subject: "What image do you have about Japanese interpersonal relationships? What are the characteristics of Japanese human relationships? Write each of your associated items on the card."

After acquisition of association items about Japanese interpersonal relationships, the researcher presented and read the next stimulus sentences: "What image do you have about your own country's interpersonal relationships? What are the characteristics of human relationships in your country? Write each of your associated items on the card."

(2) *Order of importance of association items*

The researcher asked the participant to order intuitively the associated items about Japanese, according to importance, without regard to positive or negative perceptions. Next, the same procedure was applied to the associated items about Malaysians.

(3) *Instructions for rating the similarity between each pair of items*

The instructions for estimating the similarity between items were: "Please rate the similarity between each pair of items you listed, according to a seven-point scale: (1) extremely close, (2) very close, (3) relatively close, (4) neither close nor distant, (5) relatively distant, (6) very distant, (7) extremely distant. Evaluate intuitively, and do not evaluate in terms of the accuracy of the meaning in the dictionary." The participant rated items about Japanese first, followed by items about Malaysians.

(4) *Cluster analysis and description of each cluster by the participant*

After two similarity matrices about Japanese and Malaysians were obtained, cluster analyses were conducted individually using Ward's method. The subsequent processes were conducted first about Japanese and second about Malaysians. The participant was then asked to describe the image or interpretation for each cluster and finally to indicate single-item images (positive [plus], negative [minus] or neutral [zero]).
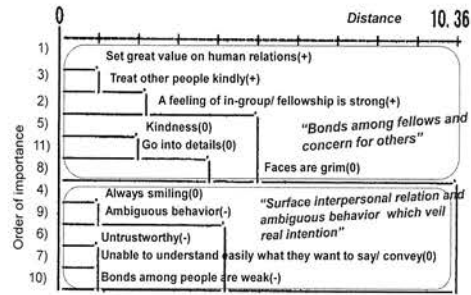

Fig. 1. Cluster Analysis about Japanese Interpersonal Relationships +, 0 or − in parentheses means independent image of each item.

RESULTS

Subject's images and interpretations of clusters

(1) *Japanese interpersonal relationships*

The result of the cluster analysis about Japanese interpersonal relationships is presented in Fig. 1. The item number on the left side indicates the intuitive order of importance. There are three + items, five zero items, and three − items, so we can assume conflicts. The subject's image or interpretation of each cluster was as follows.

First cluster: Japanese are kind and set great value on groupism. I imagined "Set great value on human relations" from activities of my circle. "Treat other people kindly" came to mind from the scene when I met customers in a part-time job. I was aware of "A feeling of in-group is strong," when I went to see the cherry blossoms with Japanese. I felt "Kindness" when I met my (vicarious) Japanese mother in Tokyo. Japanese demand that I "Go into details" in the situation of an in-group. When I talked with Japanese friends at first, I found that "Faces are grim." We can interpret this cluster as "Bonds among fellows and concern for others."

Second cluster: "Untrustworthy." A bit faithless. They do not disclose their mind. They are trapped. I cannot understand the meaning of their behavior. "Ambiguous behavior." I am not able to get their real intention, for they are "always smiling." I feel a negative image. I think that they might talk straightforwardly. I would like to build up genuine relationships with Japanese. I want them to speak to me more. I think a human relationship is the most important thing. This cluster

means "Surface interpersonal relations and ambiguous behavior that veil real intentions."

(2) *Malaysian interpersonal relationships*

The result of the cluster analysis about Malaysian interpersonal relationships is presented in Fig. 2. The item number on the left side indicates the intuitive order of importance. There are six + items, five zero items, and four − items, so we can assume conflicts. The subject's image or interpretation of each cluster was as follows.

First cluster: Trustworthy. The percentage of "Honest person" is high, people "Are often misunderstood" and "Are easily hurt by other people." Though they "Do not have a strong sense of responsibility," I think "Family is the most important thing." I feel a contradiction. They are "Rough" and yet weak at maintaining valuable things. This cluster is composed of contradictions, and we could name it "Frank exchange of views, misunderstanding and undependable."

Second cluster: "Friendly" But "Complicated." I would like to make a friend, but I am afraid of rejection upon joining the group. I have a sense of patriotism. I feel friendly, warm and energetic activity. Sometimes I feel embarrassment, smiling, and unkindness. There is "Strong racial consciousness" in this cluster. We can interpret it as "Harmonious exchange beyond racial and ethnic background."

Third cluster: Be careful. Treat everything warily. Be angry against "Inequity." Though every race is total Malaysian, people take a glance at the differences among races and "Feel strong fellowship with people of the same race. Become sorrowful. I

want and make an effort to integrate all races." The third cluster is named "Endeavor to integrate people as (totally) Malaysian."

DISCUSSION

The results clarified characteristics of Japanese interpersonal relations: i) the first cluster was "Bonds among fellows and concern for others", ii) the second cluster was "Surface interpersonal relations and ambiguous behavior that veil real intentions." The participant narrated her experiences. Though we see superficially a feeling of ingroup fellowship and kindness to other people, we also see ambiguous behavior that veils real intentions. "Faces are grim" in the first cluster is connected with and suggests "Bonds among people are weak" in the second cluster.

In contrast, the clusters for Malaysians were i) "Frank exchange of views, misunderstanding, and undependable," ii) "Harmonious exchange beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds," and iii) "Endeavor to integrate peoples as Malaysian." The participant insisted on "Endeavor to integrate peoples as (totally) Malaysian" in the third cluster. The means to this end is a "Frank exchange of views," despite the "Misunderstanding and undependable," in the first cluster and "Harmonious exchange beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds" in the second cluster. The symbolic item is "Communication in English" in the second cluster, which is not the official language (bahasa Malaysia). This combines with "Do not have a strong sense of responsibility" in the first cluster and "Inequity" in the third cluster.

These results revealed that the Chinese Malaysian international student has a clear schema about Japanese, but her schema about Malaysian interpersonal relationships showed conflicts among races and an endeavor for integration. Nevertheless, we can address the peculiarity of this participant. She feels inequity as a Chinese Malaysian, since a native Malaysian has advantages with respect to entrance into a national university and employment at a company. However, she concludes that a total Malaysian needs "harmonious exchange beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds" and will "endeavor to integrate people
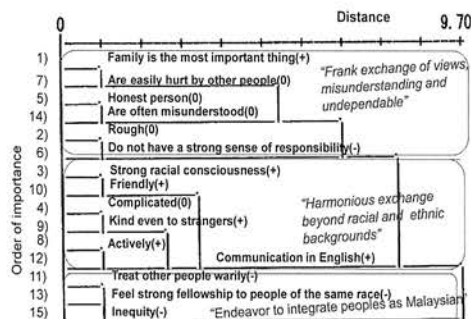

Fig. 2. Cluster Analysis about Malaysian Interpersonal Relationships +, 0 or − in parentheses means independent image of each item.

as Malaysians." Though complicated problems exist among races, people treat others warily and communicate generally not in Malayan but in the English language. Comparing the result of the PAC analysis of Malaysian interpersonal relationships with the result for the Japanese, we are able to clearly measure a certain type of cognitive construct and find the meaning of it using the subject of a survey in a multiracial nation. PAC Analysis is suitable, in a single case, to search for factors and to diagnose the cognitive structure of one subject.

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