



Human Geography Analysis and How Cultures Think Differently

Gwyneth Sutherland, PhD
Director of Human Geography and Analytics Research
Geographic Services Inc.

If we have admitted or at least suspect that we have a gap in our understanding about another culture, then we should not assume that a culture's communication, psychology, identity narrative, and value norms resemble our own. We need tools and models that can detect cultural variation and help us gain 'local' perspective. If that other culture has a different concept of morality, we need to know. If they have a different concept of time, that will affect how they plan operations or how they coordinate as partners in planning. If they have a different sense of identity (individual vs. collective, for example), they may have a different idea about personal responsibility or even cause and effect.

Culture is often seen as nebulous social science, or it is lumped in with language. This section is based on experience in intercultural conflict mediation and research in cognitive linguistics, neurophysiology, cultural communication, information science, and conflict analysis—it looks at how cultures think differently. Problem solve differently. And almost have a different logic.

This is a brief summary of cultural variation in narrative, perception, and cognition; methods to operationalize these variations for CT messaging and OE analysis with Human Geography analytics; and a description of available data sets for the MENA AOI that can be leveraged for this exercise.

What does it mean to say cultures think differently?

	Example	take away
1	Cambridge students were asked to read and recall a Native American folktale. They struggled. They changed the sequence of events, they came up with new rationalizations for things they didn't understand, and they omitted or changed details that were unfamiliar.	we will distort narrative or analysis of narratives to fit our own construction
2	Liebes and Katz (1990) asked Americans, Israelis, Arabs, Russian, and Moroccan Jews (in Israel) to watch and recall episode of the tv series Dallas. They found considerable differences in narrative patterns. Differences in what the groups focused on. And on how the groups interpreted the episodes.	Cultural variation in Perception and Interpretation of events
3	In watching the same video, Russians and Americans will interpret a scene differently because Russians do not have the concept for privacy or personal space. Therefore, perception of an event and memory and recall will be culturally different about the same witness event. (Pavlenko, 2003)	Cultural Variation in Complex Concepts



4	Costa et al. (2014) asked: “Should you sacrifice one man to save five? Whatever your answer, it should not depend on whether you were asked the question in your native language or a foreign tongue so long as you understood the problem.” This study found answers did change. (Korean, English, Spanish, French, and Hebrew).	Cultural and linguistic variation in Moral Concepts
5	In discussing conflict resolution programs with a Yemeni delegation of clerics, the Yemeni asked not to use the word for Peace (in Arabic) as a program title because it had the connotation of being associated to Israel and no one would come.	Concepts and associations are cultural

The populations (audiences) we are aiming to engage with in the MENA region are bilingual or multi-lingual. Daesh, for example, uses multiple languages for their own messaging campaigns. They are adept at shifting between languages for different purposes. From a cognitive perspective, the bi-lingual brain works differently—with perception, memory, and cognition. Shifting between linguistic identities is part of their daily lives. With this cognitive activity, they also must navigate conceptual differences and differences in cultural norms (such as politeness, intensity, gender, topic framing, communications modes such as when to use face to face and when to use social media and with whom.) Research on bi-lingual eye-witness testimony describes the way in which a witness recalls an event changes depending on the language in which they are asked and on which language the memory was made. This is called event encoding. The details that we pay attention to, remember and recall, vary by language and culture. These may be details about timing, number or gender of witnesses/participants, location, or even the type of event itself.

This explains variation in recalling events, but what about more emotionally charged narratives such as propaganda, recruiting material, identity narratives, or even misinformation? These are also based around culturally prescribed narrative pattern norms. The organization of the narratives and the underlying concepts—the thoughts, plans, dreams, cause and effect concepts that produce and construct the narrative—have been shaped by the culture of the individual. Their origin.

Geographic Services’ Human Geography analysis integrates the physical geography and the networks among people who live there—the Human Geography. We research ethnicity, religion, language, tribal affiliation (or social relationships), and political allegiance at a granular family-group level. By providing a deep understanding of the locations (origins) of people and their socio-cultural identity (religion, ethnicity, language), we can localize communications analysis around cultural variation in thinking by addressing a major shortcoming of current communications analyses—namely, the lack of a cultural variable in big data analytics algorithms. Currently, online communications (social media, survey forms, crowdsourced geotagged crisis events) were designed from one culture’s cognitive perspective—they



have an English or American logic to categories/concept/time and follow our cultural narrative structure. For individuals from other cultures who write in these platforms (such as social media), they must shift their narratives at a conceptual (thought) level, often unconsciously, even when the interface is in their native language, in order to fit their narrative into the prescribed narrative and conceptual construction of the culture of design-- US. The narrative they produce is distorted. The distortions occur at collection and during analysis because we are investigating narrative patterns based on false assumptions of universality across cultures. Preliminary research suggests (Sutherlin, 2014 and ongoing) the distortions are directly related to how distant or different that culture is to the culture that designed the technology. At GSI, our native linguists and socio-cultural experts work with our data to identify when this occurs and develop analytic tools and collection methods that will not suffer these distortions.

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