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Cross-Cultural Investigation of Political Thinking and Need for Closure

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Abstract

There are a number of theories as to classifying various cultures, of which the individualist versus collectivist grading is most widely accepted. Various societies have been examined using this classification from various points of view, but only a few of these studies focused on measuring differences in cognitive style (Rokeach, 1960). Recent thesis deals with the people living around us, and with the very personal ways of processing information about the society around us. Its latest version is the theory of the so-called "need for closure" (Kruglanski, 2004). This topic is dealt with only by a few researchers (with the exception of Fu and colleagues 2007 for example) as connecting the two above topics concerns two very distinct areas of social psychology.

Our Present research compares the data of a Hungarian (N=140) and a Korean (N=148) university student regarding their need for closure and the acceptance of certain values. Interviewees were asked to fill in the need for closure scale by Webster and Kruglanski (1994) – the Hungarian version by Csanádi and colleagues 2009, and the Korean version respectively. Furthermore, they were asked about their opinion on modern (e.g. homeland defence, economic development) and post-modern (e.g. freedom of speech) values.

Answers measuring both need for closure and values convey that Koreans' results are much more homogenous and uniform than the results of their Hungarian counterparts. Koreans (due to their high standard of economic development) have preferred post-modern values when compared to Hungarians.

Key words: *need for closure, culture, values*

1. Introduction

1.1 Individualism vs. Collectivism

The culture dimensions of Individualism versus Collectivism stands as one of the most widely used and accepted method of explaining cultural difference, and recent decades have seen a large number of psychological theories and studies employing these dimensions. Whereas the individual is the focus in individualistic cultures, the collectivists focus on society and give priority to group rights over individual rights (Fiske et al. 2006). In our paper, we compared South Korea, a country that is considered to be collectivistic (scores low on Hofstede's (2010) Individualism), with Hungary, which nowadays appears to be individualistic despite of its communist past. This assumption is based on recent research findings, which indicated that Hungary is more

individualistic than some of its neighbouring countries that have undergone similar political and social transformations, such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, or other Western European countries such as Germany (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2005; Hungarostudy, 2006 all quoted from Kopp, Skrabski, 2008; Hofstede, 2010).

1.2 Political thinking, Need for Closure, conservatism

Various societies have been examined based on this classification from various points of view, but only a few of these studies focused on measuring differences in cognitive styles. Rokeach (1960), who was the first to describe cognitive styles identified two styles of information processing we employ to think about the society: an open approach, capable of individual consideration and; a closed approach, characterized by less flexibility and refinement. He argued that closed thinking can be observed in radical proponents of both leftist and rightist ideologies (Rokeach, 1960). Furthermore, other types of cognitive and motivational needs exist beyond these ideologies. The Need for Closure (NFC) is one, which is the second important issue in this research. The theory belongs to a group of cognitive style concepts. This theory was amended by Kruglanski (1989). Kruglanski and Webster (1994) created the Need For Closure Scale (NFCS), which measures the relatively stable disposition of an individual's motivational attitude towards closure. Those who are high in Need for Closure (NFC) tend to make faster decisions with a limited available information. This type of cognitive style is shown to have connection with the closed thinking described earlier (Kruglanski, 1989.; Kruglanski, 2004).

Over the last few decades, several authors have found connections between political conservatism and closed thinking. Others argued that a high need for closure is equally present in the political Left at the extremists (summarized by Jost et al, 2003; Kruglanski, 2004). This statement is based on findings that claim that the core of the conservative ideology is resistance to changes and acceptance of social inequalities. Resistance to change is correlated with the higher need for closure (Jost et al, 2003). Kossowska and Van Hiel (2003) found connection between higher NFC and conservatism in both Polish and Flemish samples. Nevertheless, high NFC was linked with low economic conservatism in the Ex-Communist country of Poland. Therefore, the difference between economic and political conservatism should be distinguished, which is important to note especially in regards to discussing Ex-Communist countries. In our research, we measured political conservatism. There are only a few other recent investigations in Ex-Communist countries performed using this scale. One of these is Zavala and Bergh (2007), whose results demonstrated a connection between higher need for closure and both the traditional and modern worldviews in a Polish sample.

1.3 Values

Inglehart (1971) was first to note the change (or how he called: the "revolution") of values in the seventies. He explained that the rapid economic development in the developed countries caused postmodern/post-materialistic values (e.g. protecting freedom of speech, making our cities more beautiful, etc.) to replace modern/materialistic ones (e.g. making sure that the country has strong defence forces, the fight against crime, etc.). However, in less economically developed countries, it was

found that individuals still prioritised modern values over postmodern ones (Inglehart, 1971). The theory of Postmodernisation is based mainly on the fact that in the countries with great economical growth, people perceive less importance for modern values, since the societal conditions already allow them to enjoy stability and security, and come to emphasise postmodern values. Keller (2008)'s analysis of the data from European Social Survey (2004) found that Hungarians preferred modern values.

2. Research Questions

This topic is dealt by only a few researchers abroad (with the exception of Fu et al. 2007), as the three topics/issues covered above topics are concerned with very distinct areas of social psychology. We have to note that there are objections to this kind of cross-cultural research. Choi and Choi (2002) argue against comparing the results from a same questionnaire across cultures, as the understanding will always differ. Because of this issue, we mainly compared the patterns that occurred from the data rather than relying on the scores from the items alone. Taking into consideration the necessary factors, we composed following research questions:

- Are there differences between the Need for Closure scores and the pattern of the NFC between the two cultures? What kind of differences emerge between the two sample at the pattern of the political thinking (political orientation, party preference)?
- Do we find connection between the need for closure and the preference of the conservative ideology?
- Does the preference of the postmodern values at the South Koreans and the preference of the modern values at the Hungarian values appear?

3. Our research – The Sample and method

Our Present research compares the data from a Hungarian (N=140, Female: 91, Male: 49, average age: 22,5) and a South Korean (N=148, Female: 51, Male: 97, average age: 22) samples of university students in the October of 2009 regarding their political thinking, need for closure and the acceptance of certain values.

We asked them to fill in the Need for Closure scale by Webster and Kruglanski (1994) – the Hungarian version (Csanádi et al., 2009), and the Korean version respectively. The versions were created using back-translation methods. Furthermore, they were asked about their opinion on modern (e.g. homeland defence, economic development) and postmodern (e.g. freedom of speech) values. In the questionnaire, there were additional questions about their political party preferences, level of commitment to the party, and which ideology they identified with most among the three—conservative, socialist, or liberal in independent ten-point-scales as suggested by Kerlinger (1984).

4. Results

4.1 The pattern of the NFC scores and the political thinking

4.1.1 NFC scores and its pattern

The South Koreans average need for closure score was lower than the score of the Hungarians. Its statistic deviance is smaller than in the Hungarian sample as seen in Table 1.

Nationality	Mean	N	St. Dev.
Hungarian	111.25	139	14.531
South Korean	104.81	144	9.720

Table 1: The mean and the statistic deviation of the Need for Closure scores

4.1.2 Party preference and NFC in South Korea and Hungary

We tested the relationship between the need for closure and party preference of each sample. The scores obtained in the Need for Closure Scale divided each of our samples into three groups:

- High Need for Closure (those who obtained the top 25%, or the top quartile, scores)
- Middle Need for Closure
- Low Need for Closure (the lowest quartile scores)

4.1.2.1 Party preference and Need for Closure in South Korea

Table 2 shows the party preference and the need for closure groups in the Korean sample. Only those parties that had at least six voters were included in the analysis. The level of Need for Closure did not predict which party they preferred. Ten percent of the sample would not vote if there would be elections at the time of the research.

South Korean	Labour Party	Con. Party	Green Party	Not vote
low NFC	11	15	4	4
middle NFC	21	30	8	7
high NFC	12	11	5	4
Total	44	56	17	15

Table 2: The party preference and Need for Closure in the Korean sample

4.1.2.2 Party preference and need for closure in Hungary

Table 3 shows the party preference and the need for closure groups in the Hungarian sample. Only the parties that had at least six voters remained in the analysis. The level of Need for Closure did not predict which party they preferred. The main parties did not differ from each other. But LMP-HP has lower Need for Closure voters, but no significant difference was found. 21 % of the sample would not vote if there would be elections at the time of the research.

Hungarian	FIDESZ	MSZP	Jobbik	LMP-HP	Not vote	Total
low NFC	10	2	2	7	5	30
middle NFC	25	7	8	9	17	71
high NFC	10	2	2	3	10	31
Total	45	11	12	19	32	132

Table 3: The party preference and Need for Closure in the Hungarian sample

At the political orientation we found larger deviance at the Hungarian sample than in the South Korean. Korean mean scores were close to each other in every way.

4.2 Need for Closure and conservatism

We found significant correlation between Need for Closure and the conservatism in the Hungarian sample (Spearman Correlation, $r = 0.181$, $p < 0.05$). However, we did not find this kind of significant connection in the South Korean sample.

4.3 Modern and postmodern values

Table 4 shows the number of the respondents that preferred the modern or the postmodern values in our South Korean and Hungarian sample. South Koreans are higher in the acceptance of the postmodern values. Henceforth the statistic deviation of the single items (e.g. homeland defence, freedom of speech, etc.) was also larger in the Hungarian sample.

	postmodern pref.	modern pref.	Total
Hungarian	37	95	136
South Korean	66	62	146
	103	157	282

Table 4: the preference of the modern and the postmodern values in the whole sample

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In every part of political thinking, the South Korean sample was more homogenous than the Hungarian. We found this pattern for the Need for Closure scores, where South Koreans were closer to each other in their answers. The same pattern was seen for party preference, where the results from South Koreans painted a much more homogenous picture. This happened also for endorsement of modern versus postmodern values.

Altogether, answers measuring both Need for Closure and values convey that the results from South Koreans are much more homogenous and uniform than the results from their Hungarian counterparts.

We found connection between higher Need for Closure and conservatism in the Hungarian sample, but not in the South Korean sample. Therefore, what previous literature suggested (Jost et al, 2003; Kossowska and Van Hiel, 2003; Zavala and Bergh, 2007) was not verified in our research for the South Korean sample.

In agreement with our expectations based on Inglehart's works (1971; 1997), South Koreans (due to their high standard of economic development) demonstrated higher level of endorsement of postmodern values compared to Hungarians.

6. Future plans

Our future plans involve extending our research with data from an individualistic country, and will include data from Canada, which we hope will broaden the scope and coverage of our investigation. Furthermore, we would like to investigate deeper into the connections between values and Need for Closure.

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