SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Socio-cultural differences in the self-descriptions of two groups of Azerbaijanian students learning in the Russian and Azerbaijani languages

Maria A. Dzherelievskaya*, Anna V.Vizgina

Faculty of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

*Corresponding author. E-mail: madj@mail.ru

Background: The dimension of individualism-collectivism is regarded as one of the most important cultural factors that influence a person's self-consciousness, and help shape his/her sense of self as independent or interdependent. Moreover, studies support the conclusion that the salience of both tendencies may vary not only within a single national culture (depending on the place of residence, language environment, etc.), but also on the level of the individual self (depending on the current situation). In our research we have assumed that the language environment (receiving education in one's native or a foreign language) acts as a socio-cultural factor affecting the self-concept of students of the same nationality–more specifically, the intensity of their individualistic and collectivistic characteristics.

Objective: Finding socio-cultural differences in self-image between two groups of Azerbaijanian students (learning in Russian and Azerbaijanian, respectively).

Design: The sample included one hundred students from Baku colleges and universities equally divided into two groups. Participants in the first group were studying in Azerbaijani while those in the second group were learning in Russian. We collected data in the form of open-ended self-descriptions. We examined these texts using content-analysis procedures. Then we calculated correlations between certain defined characteristics for each group.

Results: The self-descriptions produced by students learning in Azerbaijanian contained the following features: norm compliance as a significant factor in emotional well-being; self-criticism related to negative feelings and expectation of outside criticism; the prevalence of self-justification and bravado as basic forms of psychological defense, combined with the lack of self-enhancement; and focus on society and interpersonal relations affecting the respondents' inner feelings. The second group's (those learning in Russian) self-descriptions featured positive self-esteem as an important component of emotional well-being. Self-criticism was not associated with negative feelings and oth-

ers' judgments. In the texts of Russian-speaking students there was a tendency to use self-embellishment as a way of self-enhancement. This group was less inclined to focus on society.

Conclusions: The characteristics of these two groups' self-depictions gravitated toward two different self-constructs: independent (for those learning in Russian) and interdependent (for the participants learning in Azerbaijanian), the division being in line with the individualistic and collectivistic culture, respectively.

Keywords: Self-attitude, self-consciousness, open-ended self-descriptions, psychological defense strategies, socio-cultural differences in self-descriptions

Introduction

Self-concept, self-image, and self-attitude aren't just individualized intimate aspects of our mind that reveal the uniqueness and individuality of our person. They also have certain common properties determined by the socio-cultural context in which they were formed and function. There has been a powerful tendency in Russian psychology to emphasize the socio-cultural influence on the formation of the human psyche. This primarily goes back to the cultural-historical approach founded by L. Vygotsky and A. Luria. Using this approach, Luria (1974) carried one of the first cross-cultural studies of self-consciousness in Uzbekistan (1931-1932). His research showed that awareness and evaluation of one's own psychological characteristics is a process that develops under the direct influence of a person's social experience–i.e., one's conditions of social existence. The influence of social media on different aspects of self-concept was explored in works by such Russian authors as I.S. Kon (1984), P. Tulviste (1988), T.G. Stefanenko (1999), and others.

In foreign cross-cultural studies, special attention has been paid to the dimension of individualism-collectivism since the 1990s. This kind of framework led to the development of the self-construals theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Voyer & Bradley, 2014), which allows us to comprehend cultural influences on self-consciousness in terms of individualism and collectivism as key values. According to this theory, individualistic and collectivist cultures affect the self-consciousness in different ways, thus producing one of two types of self-construal: the independent self and the interdependent self, respectively. Individuals possessing the independent self-consciousness are characterized as free-spirited, competitive, and self-sufficient. They seek success, self-actualization, and self-expression. This is accompanied by a higher level of self-esteem, which is based on personal success and achievements. There is also a strong tendency to build up a positive self-attitude (self-enhancement).

The interdependent self, on the other hand, focuses on the desire to create a harmonious relationship with others. Individuals with this type of self-construal are sensitive to external evaluation, and feel the need to be accepted by others, and to comply with intragroup norms and values. Such representatives of collectivistic cultures are ready to sacrifice their independence and individual freedom in order to reach agreement with other members of the group and avoid social rejection. Generally, they tend to be more self-critical, have a lower level of self-esteem, and are less likely to build up a positive self-attitude.

The empirical support for these differences can be found in several studies. They have shown that representatives of individualistic cultures consider positive information about themselves more relevant than negative when it comes to assessing their personality. On the contrary, those representing collectivist cultures view themselves in the light of negative information (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002 for meta-analysis). In one of the studies, American and Japanese students assessed the way imaginary situations of success or failure impacted their self-esteem. The results showed that the Americans believed that they would be more influenced by success than by failures, and thus experience an increase in their self-esteem. In the case of the Japanese participants, failures had a greater impact (although negative) on their self-esteem (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunit, 1997).

There is additional evidence demonstrating that individualism stimulates the tendency toward self-enhancement. It is the so-called above-average effect–i.e., when respondents rate themselves above average when it comes to the majority of desirable qualities (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). This effect–as well as the disposition to favor oneself over other people and the tendency to recall personal achievements and positive events preferentially, while attributing positive characteristics to one's self–relates to self-empowerment strategies aimed at maintaining and enhancing one's self-esteem.

In the above-mentioned article "Is there a universal need for a positive self-regard?" Heine and his colleagues (1999) developed the idea that the differences between North Americans and Japanese are mostly determined by their divergent cultural values. The formation and maintenance of the independent self in individualistic cultures becomes possible because society approves such qualities as successfulness, self-confidence, competitiveness, and high self-esteem. The possessor of such characteristics thinks of herself or himself as an adequate and valuable member of society, thus gaining positive emotions and a sense of satisfaction. Therefore, this person is highly motivated to strengthen positive feelings about herself or himself.

In collectivist cultures, the social values call for harmonious relations with members of other groups and adherence to societal norms. It is quite possible for striving for positive self-esteem to come in conflict with such values. Thus, in this case, positive emotions are not associated with a sense of superiority and high self-worth; they are rather the product of experiencing conformity and peaceful coexistence. That is why a person with such characteristics doesn't prioritize the need to enhance and maintain self-esteem.

According to the authors of this study, one of the cultural norms in Japan is the need for self-improvement; this norm explains the reasons for national self-criticism and the propensity to experience failures as more relevant to one's sense of self. A Japanese person signals to others that he or she is aiming at self-improvement by criticizing himself or herself, and by fixing personal shortcomings. In this way he or she considers himself or herself to be a worthy member of society.

Another important consequence of the social focus in Japan is the heightened awareness of one's audience, both external and internal, and the desire to meet its

expectations. Thus, the authors conclude that the self-enhancement motivation is virtually nonexistent for an average Japanese person, who is rather driven by the motivation for belonging, conformity, and self-improvement.

Further cross-cultural studies researching the differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures have both verified the phenomena revealed in this study, and challenged these radical views from several points of view.

For example, in his research Kurman (2001, 2003), an Israeli psychologist, aimed to prove that representatives of collectivist countries also seek to improve and maintain their self-esteem. For this purpose, the researcher analyzed the relationship between self-enhancement and the experience of inner well-being. The study actually showed the importance of the self-enhancement motivation for a number of collectivistic cultures, with the exception of the case of Japanese respondents, who showed no significant correlations between positive emotions and positive self-esteem. According to Kurman, the fact that the positive self-concept of the Japanese was not accompanied by positive feelings, indicated the influence of additional cultural factors, e.g., social censure of positive self-esteem and praise for modesty.

However, the roles of modesty as a factor decreasing self-esteem and of the self-empowerment tendency in collectivistic cultures are still being questioned. Some data suggest that modesty here is external in nature; it is to be considered a tribute to cultural demands and conceals a sense of internal self-respect which is universal in all cultures (Yamaguchi & Greenwald, 2007). Other studies assert that self-criticism is deeply rooted in collectivistic cultures (Heine et al., 1999).

Another vector of research in this area advances the idea that the motivation for improving and maintaining self-esteem is universal for all cultures, but has its own specifics in each case. Then, two types of psychological defense strategies are outlined: the first one involves improving self-esteem, while the second strategy calls for self-protection. Representatives of individualistic cultures usually prefer to enhance self-esteem: they accentuate and sometimes exaggerate their assets. This strategy is associated with such tendencies as concentrating on achievements and making social comparisons in one's own favor.

Representatives of collectivistic cultures of East Asia, on the other hand, are prone to self-protection: they deny or justify their shortcomings. This type of strategy is related to conformity and to avoiding the violation of social standards. Being more sensitive to negative feedback and considering it more significant to the self-concept these people try to defend their self-esteem in advance by justifying themselves, or proving the injustice of the expected criticism (Hepper, Sedikides, & Cai, 2013).

While recognizing the universality of the motivation to improve and maintain self-esteem, many authors think that the differences between cultures are based on what are considered key characteristics for self-attitude. It has already been shown that the level of global self-esteem is high in all cultures, but this conclusion requires elaboration as to what contributes to a sense of self-esteem. Representatives of collectivism find the sphere of interpersonal relations more relevant, and communication skills more significant. In the case of individualism, the sphere of personal achievements and business-like qualities are more important. The results

of the research demonstrate that the levels of self-regard and sympathy for oneself differ significantly in these two types of cultures: in the case of the collectivist culture, self-liking makes a greater contribution to overall self-regard, and in the case of the individualistic, that role belongs to self-competence (Allik, 2005; Kurman, 2001; Tafarodi, 1999).

Recently, the concept of pan-cultural self-enhancement has become significantly widespread. According to this concept, the individualistic dimension is important for the self-consciousness in both types of cultures, and the current trend consists in gradually shifting from the collectivistic interdependent self towards the independent self. The research results have shown that dwelling in modern cosmopolitan megalopolises contributes to strengthening the individualistic self, while living in small towns or rural areas reinforces the collectivist self (Kashima et al., 2004; Yamagishi, Hashimoto, Li, & Schug, 2012). However, there is also an inverse relationship: the results of another study indicate that people choose their place of residence depending on their dominant tendency. For example, individuals with a view of themselves as independent and a high level of individualism prefer living in big cities. That is not the case for those possessing the interdependent self (Kitayama, 2014; Sevincer, Kitayama & Varnum 2015).

Overall, the current trend in cross-cultural psychology is to avoid asserting the flat-out opposition of the two cultures, and to dismiss false generalizations regarding their influence on a person's psychological characteristics. Instead of considering collectivism and individualism as the poles in one dimension, it is suggested to view them as two independent dimensions that are found to a certain extent in all societies, and influence which psychological processes come to the fore, depending on the situation (Neuliep, 2017; Oyserman et al., 2002). For example, according to one meta-analysis (Oyserman et al., 2002), in spite of American culture being traditionally described as highly individualistic with hardly any collectivistic tendencies, it turned out that the United States can rival Japan's collectivist trend under certain conditions. Oyserman and colleagues offer the following explanation regarding the mechanism of cultural influence on psychological processes: a person will rely upon the dimension that he or she finds most relevant and essential under particular circumstances. This hypothesis has been confirmed in a number of studies with the help of a priming procedure (Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Guitart & Gómez, 2011).

Research problem statement

Our work is aimed at studying the differences between the characteristics of self-consciousness of two groups of respondents formally belonging to the same culture (Azerbaijanian students from Baku universities), but immersed in different language environments. In general, Azerbaijan is usually included in the list of collectivist cultures, although, according to some sources, the collectivist tendencies in the country are comparatively moderate compared to the rest of the Caucasus region (Matosyan, 2015). We have assumed that the self-consciousness of Azerbaijani students whose education is provided in a different language environment (in

our case, Russian-speaking) differs from the self-consciousness of their country-men who study in their native language.

For historical reasons, the Russian language has long been used as a means of interethnic communication. During the Soviet period, knowledge of Russian guaranteed better opportunities for one's education and career. That fact contributed to Russification until the 1990s, and created a strong contrast between those who knew Russian and the Azerbaijanian-speaking inhabitants of provinces. In spite of its weakening influence, Russian remains the second most widely spoken language in Azerbaijan. Its prevalence is especially strong among intellectuals, mainly in the fields of science and education (Huseynov, 2016). Due to this background, it is plausible to assume that those studying in Russian would be less exposed to the cultural influence of the traditional mentality, and their self-concept and self-attitude would most likely correspond to the average parameters of city dwellers–that is, closer to the individualistic rather than the collectivist self.

As for how to characterize to which camp Russian culture belongs, the empirical findings regarding the issue are few and very contradictory (Arutunyan, 2016; Geert-hofstede.com, 2017). But this is not so important to our study because, in our case, the key factor was not the influence of a particular national culture, but the very fact of studying in a foreign language, which in itself symbolizes the respondents' belonging to a group of modern cosmopolitan youth. Thus we can leave aside the analysis of the Russian mentality per se.

Goals and tasks

Our objective consisted in studying the socio-cultural differences of the self-concept in two groups of Baku students learning in Russian/Azerbaijanian.

We set the following tasks:

1. Identify similar ways of viewing oneself, i.e., general patterns of self-description characteristic of both samples;
2. Identify specific patterns that reflect the distinctive features of self-consciousness and self-attitude in each of the two groups.

Method

We chose the method of open-ended self-description (Vizgina, 2011) as an instrument for providing spontaneous actualization of an individual's self-image. This technique is aimed at revealing not only the content of one's self-image and self-attitude (personal qualities coming into one's focus of attention), but also the stylistic and formal characteristics found in the stories about one's self which reflect one's hidden self-attitude, emotional tone, and psychological defense strategies. Therefore, this method can be used to uncover layers of experiences the impact of which a person is not fully aware. Thus, it opens access to real, sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, spontaneously developing processes of self-consciousness.

Research strategy

Our research strategy consisted of finding relationships between various aspects of self-descriptions within each of the compared groups. In traditional correlation

studies, each parameter is identified using a separate questionnaire or scale which is based on self-reporting. In our case, these same aspects of self-image were identified with the help of textual self-expression. These kinds of texts are instant slices of ongoing self-processes which involve not formally related, but actually related aspects of self-attitude, self-concept, strategies for maintaining self-esteem, and emotional tone. We didn't ask participants what feelings they usually experience so that we could compare them with their self-esteem: We singled out these emotions from the text they wrote. Not only did the respondents talk about these emotions, but they also displayed them in connection with a specific topic regarding their personality. Thus, the relationship we observed between the given aspects of self-image, emotional sphere, and psychological defense tendencies shouldn't be random, but should reflect the real processes of how the students experienced themselves in a particular situation. By identifying the relationships between different parameters of self-descriptions, we were able to answer the following questions regarding each group:

1. What is the emotional meaning of positive and negative self-esteem in each group? What is the predominant motivation: self-enhancement or avoiding criticism?
2. What are the reasons for either a positive and negative self-attitude, and what aspects of self-concept are relevant to determining self-attitude?
3. How effective are different psychological defense strategies? How are they related to the individual's emotional tone and self-attitude? On whom subjects focus these strategies: themselves or others?

If the characteristics of the self-descriptions fit the known differences between the independent and the interdependent selves, it could be concluded that these characteristics were related to the culturally specific aspects of self-image and self-attitude, namely, the parameter of individualism/collectivism. In this case it was rather a matter of identifying implicit manifestations of independence and interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2009).

Procedure

The sample included 100 Baku students from Azerbaijan Technical University, the National Aviation Academy, and the Azerbaijan Tourism Institute. The average age of the participants was 19.5 years (SD = 0.5). All the students were born and raised in Azerbaijan. They were divided into two groups with an equal gender proportion. Each group consisted of 50 participants. The first group included people studying only in Azerbaijanian who don't speak Russian. The second one contained bilingual participants studying in Russian. Foreign language learning in Azerbaijan usually begins in secondary school and continues at the university level. N.I. Gasanova, a student at the Faculty of Psychology, Moscow State University, provided assistance with our research.

Our respondents were given the following instruction: "Describe yourself in a way that someone can understand what kind of person you are."

The textual analysis of the self-descriptions was done on the basis of already existing analytical categories embodying various content, stylistic, and formal aspects of the participants' self-image and self-attitude. When coding the texts, we used special instructions and 14 categories (grouped into five main blocks for simplicity purposes); these are described later in this article. The system of categories, proposed by Anna Vizgina, had already proven to be a valid tool for text analysis (Vizgina, 2001; 2013). Most categories (with the exception of the integral parameters) were identified "on the first appearance," i.e., the presence of a category was recorded on the basis of a single appearance with the help of binary classification (1–0).

The reliability of the procedure was ensured by the careful design of coding instructions for every category. This was done by specially trained experts: several psychologists, two of whom were native speakers of both Russian and Azerbaijanian, and the rest Russian-speaking. The coding procedure was carried out by two independent experts in each language; then the coding instructions for a number of questionable categories were coordinated in order to achieve the maximum consistency. After that, we calculated Kendall's coefficient of concordance: its values for different measurements ranged from 0.7 to 0.9 at a significance level of not less than 0.05.

Then, the results of the coding procedure were used to obtain an intercorrelation matrix for all the measurements for each group of respondents. We chose Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The data processing was done in the software package SPSS, version 15.

Categories

In accordance with our research tasks, we chose the following categories of content analysis:

1. Integral evaluation of the emotional tone (parameter *Optimism/Pessimism*)
2. Themes in self-descriptions, including personal traits, intentions (motives, aspirations, and interests), relationships with others, and biographical facts
3. Dominant perspective in self-descriptions, which could be either internal (a description of one's experiences, problems, and reflections) or external (a description of oneself as viewed by others, including appearance, opinions, and assessments)
4. Self-attitude expressed in the text, including self-criticism, self-acceptance, and self-respect
5. Psychological defense tendencies, including self-justification, excessive self-praise, bravado, and normativity (indications of one's correctness, conformity, and normality)

Results

The results of the correlations calculated for each sample can be found in the table below.

Table 1. Comparison of the correlations between the parameters of self-description in the two groups of respondents

Parameters of self-description	Respondents studying in Russian	Respondents studying in Azerbaijanian
Optimism/Pessimism	+: *Self-acceptance **, Excessive self-praise***	+: *Normativity*, Facts*** −: *Self-criticism**, Self-justification*, Internal perspective**, Bravado**
Self-criticism	+: *Internal perspective**, Description of traits* −: Normativity*^	+: *Internal perspective**, External perspective*, Self-justification* −: Optimism**, Facts**
Self-acceptance	+: *Optimism**, Self-respect**	+: *Relations with others***
Self-regard	+: *Self-acceptance*, Excessive self-praise*, Intentions**	−: *Normativity**
Excessive self-praise	+: *Optimism**, Self-respect*, Normativity**	+: *Description of traits**
Self-justification	+: *Relations with others**, External perspective***	+: *Relations with others**, External perspective**, Self-criticism**, Bravado**, Internal perspective*; −: Optimism**, Intentions**, Facts**
Bravado		+: *Self-justification**, Pessimism**, Relations with others*, External perspective*, Self-criticism, Facts**, Intentions*, Optimism***
Internal perspective of self-description	+: *Self-criticism**, Description of traits** −: Normativity***	+: *Self-criticism**, Relations with others*, Self-justification*, Pessimism** −: Facts**
External perspective of self-description	+: *Self-justification**	+: *Self-justification**, Self-criticism*, Bravado* −: Facts*, Intentions**
Relations with others	+: *Self-justification***	+: *Internal perspective*, Self-justification**, Self-acceptance**, Bravado**
Normativity	+: *Excessive self-praise* −: Internal perspective**, Self-criticism***	+: *Optimism*** −: Self-respect**

Note: * = 5% significance level; ** = 1% significance level.

Discussion

Self-attitude and the emotional tone of self-description

Our results showed that the emotional tone of self-description had a specific psychological meaning for each group. In the Russian-speaking cluster, a positive tone was associated with a positive self-attitude (self-acceptance and excessive self-

praise). Moreover, the parameters of emotional mood and self-criticism weren't negatively correlated. That is, these respondents tended to experience positive emotions by demonstrating self-acceptance and praising themselves, while their self-criticism was not accompanied by emotions of the opposite kind. Although the use of correlations hardly allows us to make any definite cause-effect conclusions, we may still assume that positive self-attitude and self-praise had a greater influence on the respondents' mood than the depressing effect of negative self-attitude. The point is that a positive self-attitude is an important component of a feeling of inner well-being.

According to those who support the idea that one's self is culturally specific, such a combination is characteristic of people representing individualistic cultures (Heine, et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 1997). This result also is coherent with the tendency to perceive success as a factor increasing self-esteem, while failures do not influence people's self-concept as much (Kitayama et al., 1997). Thus, we may assume that the respondents in the Russian-speaking sample had a clear self-enhancement motivation, which is characteristic of individualistic culture.

In the group studying in Azerbaijanian, we had the opposite situation: a negative emotional tone was associated with self-criticism, while optimism had no significant correlations with positive self-esteem or self-acceptance. In the case of these students, positive self-esteem was not an important component of a sense of general inner well-being as opposed to negative self-esteem (self-criticism), that turned to be a significant element of negative mood. The fact that self-criticism had a more considerable influence on the student's mood corresponds to the already mentioned collectivistic tendency, especially characteristic of Japanese culture (Kitayama et al., 1997), where negative situations are viewed as being more relevant to one's self-esteem. That is, this result possibly means that, in the case of Azerbaijani-speaking students, self-attitude also plays an important role in regulating their emotional tone, but in a negative way. The respondents aren't that interested in feeling positive about themselves, but they would rather not feel negative about themselves, thus demonstrating a motivation for avoiding negative self-esteem.

In general, the self-concept of the Azerbaijani-speaking participants was penetrated with self-criticism to a greater degree, which was indicated by a larger number of significant positive correlations with such aspects of self-description as pessimism, self-justification, bravado, and internal and external perspectives. In the Russian cluster, self-criticism was less penetrating and negative. It was indicated by a smaller number of correlations with the other aspects of the self-image. Also, there were no correlations between this parameter and pessimism. Neither did it correlate with self-justification. Perhaps there was no need for self-justification precisely because self-criticism here wasn't so self-deprecating, and turned out to be more constructive in nature.

Some research data show that, on average, levels of self-esteem are higher in the representatives of individualistic cultures compared to those in collectivistic cultures, who have a more pronounced tendency towards self-criticism. For this reason, it's possible to conclude that the self-consciousness of the respondents who studied in Russian tended to be individualistic, while the self-consciousness of the students studying in Azerbaijanian tended to the opposite pole of the individualism-collectivism continuum.

Psychological defense strategies

We have already described two strategies of psychological defense, each of which exhibit a different type of psychological defense motivation: the first strategy is to assert the presence of positive traits in oneself, and the second strategy is to deny having negative traits. It has been empirically confirmed that the former is related to the individualistic self and has the function of self-promotion, while the latter is specific to the collectivist self and functions as self-protection (Hepper et al., 2013). Our data makes it possible to specify the exact forms that these strategies took in the texts of self-depictions.

First, we will discuss self-embellishment. In the self-description texts, this was expressed by an exaggerated emphasis on one's merits and achievements. It seemed that the student was striving to impress the reader and get the other's admiration. Such statements are a form of realizing the self-enhancement tendency: to increase one's self-esteem by convincing the other person and oneself that the subject deserves his or her positive self-attitude. It is a way to secure inner comfort and positive emotions. In our study, this strategy turned out to be effective for the group of students learning in Russian, as was demonstrated by the positive correlation between excessive self-praise and the optimistic tone of the text.

There were no significant correlations of that kind in the Azerbaijanian sample. Apparently, self-embellishment wasn't relevant for this group.

Another form of self-defense strategy is self-justification. Self-justifying statements are aimed at denying or minimizing one's shortcomings and failures. Searching for excuses and mitigating factors is a way to avoid personal responsibility. The meaning of such statements could be summed up in the phrase: "I'm not as bad as you might think."

The self-justification expressed in both study groups was related to the external perspective of self-description (viewing oneself through another's eyes), as well as to the topic of interpersonal communication. The first connection could be interpreted as a tendency to protect oneself from the expected criticism of a significant other. The second correlation suggested that the most frequent subject of self-justification is relations with other people. The respondents were prone to justify themselves in response to possible accusatory reactions regarding their mistakes and shortcomings, as manifested in interpersonal communication. These correlations allowed us to link this type of statement to the previously mentioned protective strategy intended to repulse and deprecate criticism by others. Thus, the internal dialogical character of this strategy is common to both samples: those who use it are trying to defend themselves in an internal dialogue with an image of the social other.

However, we also found evident differences between the samples. First of all, self-justification in the texts of the Azerbaijanian-speaking students was connected to self-criticism and the internal perspective of self-description. That means that these respondents tried to justify their imperfection not only in the face of an imaginary external critic, but also in front of themselves. Moreover, the process of defending oneself is related to one's individual inner experiences. Thus this tendency turned out to be more deeply rooted in the self-concept of the respondents who studied in Azerbaijanian. Unlike in the case of those learning in Russian, it wasn't just related to the external view of the other and the expectation of criticism. It was also linked to inner experience and self-criticism.

That is, these correlations can be interpreted as follows: having been internalized, the others' critical view turns into self-criticism, thus invoking internal experience and causing the need to justify oneself not only to the other, but also to oneself. In addition, self-justification correlated with a pessimistic emotional tone, so this strategy didn't fully fulfill its self-protective function in the group studying in Azerbaijanian.

Bravado is another kind of defensive speech in response to expected criticism, the meaning of which boils down to the statement: "I do have these shortcomings, but I'm proud of them."

In the Russian cluster, bravado wasn't connected to other parameters of self-description. In the group studying in Azerbaijani, it had significant correlations with self-justification and almost the same set of parameters as discussed above (self-criticism, pessimism, external perspective, relations with others), except for the internal perspective. These connections between self-criticism and pessimism in the text showed that this type of a defensive reaction doesn't allow the complete avoidance of negative experience. Thus, there is a high probability that the statements of self-justification, self-criticism, and bravado coexist in such texts. The former suggest a conflicted self-attitude in the Azerbaijanian-speaking students, which exhibited itself in a swap of positions in the internal dialogue between criticizing and protecting one's self.

The connections we found between the self-protective defensive statements and other parameters of self-description allow us to conclude that the two groups differed on the forms and meaning of self-enhancement and self-defense strategies. The tendency to exaggerate one's own importance in the eyes of others, with the help of a positive self-representation, turned out to be meaningful and effective in the group of students learning in Russian. The other tendency, to protect one's self from expected criticism, was specific to the students studying in Azerbaijanian. In the case of the Russian-speaking group, the need to justify oneself arose not to fend off self-criticism, but to parry the criticism coming from other people. Self-justification here was more superficial and didn't affect inner feelings. The lack of connection between pessimism and self-criticism indicated the relative success of such self-justification.

Thus, by comparing our results with the data of cross-cultural studies (Hepper et al., 2013), we can conclude that the Azerbaijanian-speaking respondents were closer to being representative of collectivistic cultures, because of their similar self-defense methods, while the Russian-speaking respondents resembled the representatives of individualistic cultures when it comes to self-enhancement strategies.

Focus on society

Let us compare the self-descriptions of both samples in terms of respondents' attitudes towards society.

First, we'd like to touch upon the parameter of self-criticism and the focus on external evaluation.

In the Azerbaijanian language group, we found a connection between self-criticism and the external perspective of description (concentration on how others saw them), in addition to a correlation between this parameter and the internal perspective common to the two groups. While criticizing themselves, the respondents

simultaneously described themselves through the eyes of other people. The latter indicated that they were focused on the social audience. In other words, their self-attitude depended on negative social opinions toward them. The self-criticism in the Russian-speaking participants was less dependent: there were no correlations between self-criticism and the external perspective of description.

Many researchers assume that a focus on the audience (external or internal) is a specific feature of the collectivist self. That is, compared to representatives of an individualistic culture, representatives of a collectivistic culture are more inclined to view themselves as objects (Heine at al., 1999; Mosquera & Imada, 2013). Thus, from this point of view, the self-descriptions of the Azerbaijanian-speaking respondents were consistent with the notion of the collectivist interdependent self.‑

The next subject of discussion is normativity. This parameter reveals the tendency to emphasize one's social correctness, conformity, and belonging to the majority.

We found significant positive correlations between optimism and normativity in the texts of the participants studying in Azerbaijanian. This can be understood in the following way: the experience of being socially compliant is a component of psychological well-being, and that corresponds to the value orientations in a collectivist society (Heine et al., 1999). There weren't any such correlations in the case of the Russian-speaking students.

Finally, let us discuss the sphere of interpersonal relations.

The theme of interpersonal relations was connected with self-liking and the internal perspective of description in the texts of the Azerbaijanian-speaking respondents. Their narration of their harmonious relations with others invoked positive emotions directed at themselves. The relationships were described from the internal perspective, and that indicated their importance for the respondents' self-attitude, as well as the depth of the respective experience. It is also interesting that these correlations concerned only one aspect of their self-attitude: self-liking, but not self-esteem. In the Russian language sample, such connections weren't found: the respondents' self-liking was related to their optimistic tone, while self-competence correlated with excessive self-praise and describing oneself through intentions and preferences.

These results are consistent with the conclusions of several other researchers, according to whose works the sphere of interpersonal relations is more relevant for defining self-attitude in collectivistic cultures, while success and businesslike qualities are more significant for achieving self-esteem in individualistic cultures. Moreover, in the case of the former societies, self-liking makes a greater contribution to a person's general self-attitude, and in the case of the latter, this role belongs to self-competence (Tafarodi, 1999; Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Kurman, 2001).

Thus, our findings showed both common characteristics of self-consciousness (which were fewer in number) and significant differences between the two groups (which were larger in number). The common characteristics included the connection between self-criticism and the internal perspective of self-description, as well as the connection of self-justification to the external perspective of self-description and the topic of interpersonal relations. That is, in the both groups, the process of self-criticism was combined with the actualization of intimate inner experiences,

reflections, and self-analysis. The respondents' self-justification in both groups was focused on the external observer, being devoted to the topic of relations with others.

There were numerous differences between the two groups. We can preliminarily conclude (taking into account the number of the participants) that the specifics of the self-consciousness in these two groups were related to their different self-construals (independent and interdependent), each corresponding to individualistic or collectivistic cultures. However, this can be interpreted in two ways. It's possible that the results reflect stable differences in self-consciousness caused by different cultural and environmental influences. In this case, the similarity between Azerbaijanian-speaking students' self-consciousness and the interdependent self can be explained by the influence of the collectivist culture of Azerbaijan (Matosyan, 2017), whereas the correspondence between the Russian-speaking students' self -consciousness and the independent self reflects these respondents' belonging to the modern cosmopolitan urban youth culture, which is influenced by globalization and relies less on traditional values.

Another interpretation is based on the assumption that the representatives of both samples belong equally to both cultural dimensions, but responded differently due to the language factor. Language plays the role of a natural priming that actualizes the relevant patterns of individualism or collectivism. Perhaps, if the Russian-speaking students were offered the opportunity to complete the assignment in the Azerbaijani language, they would actualize other patterns of self-attitude, and their results wouldn't differ from the other sample.

The possibility of such an interpretation is indicated by some research data (Kitayama et al., 1997). In this study, Japanese people who came to study in the United States gave different answers to a set of questions regarding the way imaginary situations of success and failure influenced their self-esteem depending on the country of origin of the situations. Assessing the situations generated in the United States, the Japanese respondents perceived success as being more relevant to self-esteem, while, when assessing situations specific to Japan, they believed that failure was more likely to affect them.

Conclusion

On a number of grounds, the features of self-consciousness specific to each group of students which we found, can be related to the two types of self-construals: the independent self (attributed to individualistic cultures) and the interdependent self (attributed to collectivist cultures). Here is the list of the differences we discovered:

1. In the case of the students studying in Russian, positive self-esteem was an important component of internal well-being. For those studying in Azerbaijanian, the role of such a component belonged to norm compliance.
2. In the Azerbaijanian language group, the students' sense of self-criticism strongly depended on the expected opinion of others. It was more absolute in character and had a more negative impact on the respondents' emotional sphere. To the contrary, in the Russian language group, self-criticism was less dependent on the expected assessment and did not carry such a negative emotional load. It had a lesser effect on other aspects of the self-consciousness.

3. In the case of the participants studying in Russian, the self-enhancement motivation prevailed over criticism avoidance. The excessive self-praise here was considered an effective strategy to enhance one's self. An opposite tendency was found in the other group. The students studying in Azerbaijanian used self-justification and bravado to avoid criticism.

4. The participants studying in Azerbaijanian were more focused on society and interpersonal relations compared to those studying in Russian. Moreover, this influence can be described as more profound in nature, affecting the respondents' personal experiences.

Limitations

These findings, however, should be viewed as preliminary and presumptive for a number of reasons.

First of all, our research methodology did not fully coincide with the methodology of traditional cross-cultural studies. Therefore, the comparison between our results and other data requires certain reservations. This concerns the tools used to identify aspects of the self and, consequently, the identified constructs and units of analysis. On the other hand, our research can also be considered as a different way to confirm previously discovered patterns, with the help of different methods and material.

Secondly, the smallness of the sample doesn't allow us to make final conclusions. That is why we plan to increase the number of participants in order to verify and improve the interpretation of our results.

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