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## Cultural differences in the response conduct to personality inventories

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**Abstract.** Response styles in psychological assessment and research have been identified as an important threat to the validity of the research and to the level of confidence that a research may have. This can represent a problem namely in an intercultural research, due to the fact that individuals from different cultures may use different response scales in different ways. A sample of 90 participants, 45 Romanian and 45 Korean, aged between 28 and 55 years of age, have been assessed with The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and with California Personality Inventory (CPI). The main objective was to identify significant cultural differences regarding the response conduits of the participants. Based on this objective we emitted the following hypotheses: (1) we presume there are significant differences in social desirability regarding self-control between Romanian and Korean subjects; (2) we presume there are significant differences in the Lie Scale regarding responsibility and the level of study of the participants; (3) we presume there are significant differences between self-image management between Romanian and Korean subjects; (4) we presume there are significant differences between social conformism between Romanian and Korean subjects. All hypotheses were confirmed. Results are discussed based on the importance of the cultural factor in human behaviour.

**Keywords.** Cultural differences, response conduct, personality inventories, Romanian and Korean participants.

### 1. Introduction

Response styles have long been identified as a major threat to the research study [1], [2]. This problem may be exacerbated in intercultural research, as individuals from different cultural backgrounds may use response scales in different ways [3]. Therefore, the aim is to investigate the extent to which response styles work in an intercultural context and how they can be isolated. Cross-cultural researchers conducting studies with individuals from different cultural groups need to consider whether the scores obtained are comparable [4]. The literature presents three common types of response styles. The first is the submissive response style (ARS), which is the tendency to agree or disagree independently with the content item [5]. This type of answer usually leads to a shift of the item average in an upward or downward direction. The second type is the extreme response style (ERS), which is the tendency to use only moderate or extreme categories of the rating scale. Regardless of the content item, individuals agree or disagree with a strong item content of they tend to use only the middle categories. The third style of response most often mentioned in the literature is the abbreviated social desirability of SDR [6]. This is a tendency to respond in a socially desirable way, which is

tantamount to responding in a way that is expected to gain the approval of significant other respondents. The question that aroused the interest of the literature was: what is the style and what is the error in intercultural comparisons? [7].

Minulescu distinguishes between management and the impression of self-deception, which is an unconscious tendency to see and portray oneself in a socially acceptable way [8]. The results on the impression management scale correlate very well with the results on the Lie scale in the Eysenck Personality Inventory, both in the case of typical populations and in prisoner populations [9], an aspect that suggests that these two measurements overlap considerably.

Marsella, Dubanoski, Hamada and Morse [10] experimentally manipulated the influence of self-presentation goals (to look pleasant, to look competent or just to know their interlocutor) on verbal simulation. The results showed that people tell more lies when they have a self-presentational purpose, and both women and men tell the same number of lies, but of different types. Moreover, the content of the lies varied according to the purpose of the self-presentation.

A very important dimension that interferes with the investigation of the relationship between personality and simulation in social desirability is the fact that socially desirable responses can appear either as a set of responses (a temporary response in a situation that requires a positive self-presentation) or as a response style (a stable trans-situational individual variable) [8]. Paulhus [11] distinguished between two types of social desirability in responses: self-deception and impression management. Self-deception is understood by the author as an honest, but very positive response style. Impression management is rather conscious and deliberate misinformation, a form of simulation known as lie or pretense. Impression management has been shown to be much more dependent or constrained of the situation than self-deception [12], [13], [14], [15]. Furthermore, studies show that Extraversion correlated positively and Neuroticism correlated negatively with Self-Deceptive Enhancement, whereas Psychoticism correlated negatively and the Lie scale correlated positively with Impression Management [16].

In a meta-analysis of over 41 countries, Little [17] calculated the adhesion of scores for different scales in personality and socio-psychological and organizational domains. He showed that 3.1% of the total variation was divided between all scales, indicating a systematic influence of response styles in cross-cultural comparisons. Similarly, in a large-scale study involving 26 countries, Hofstede and McCrae [18] found consistent intercultural differences in consent and extremity of responding. Moreover, they found that intercultural differences in response styles are systematically linked to various country characteristics.

Studies that have attempted to relate general personality traits to the tendency to lie, have yielded contradictory results [10]. Two observations are relevant in this context. First, it is possible that the relationship between personality and the tendency of the mind is mediated by the context that initiates the lie. Paunonen and Ashton [19] assessed whether the simulation is determined by context, or whether some people tend to lie regardless of the circumstances. The authors present an interactive model, suggesting that the simulation is clearly favored by unfavorable circumstances and the maintenance of reputation encourages honesty, especially in the case of individuals with social inclinations.

Caprara, Barbaranelli, Bermudez, Laslach & Ruch [9] also investigated whether individual differences in personality are related to simulation skills. The authors examined the possibility that differences in personality traits or gender may influence the time required to tell the truth or a lie about autobiographical information. The authors anticipated a positive

relationship between the time required to tell a lie and the scores on the Lie scale due to the usual response patterns.

It has been observed that higher scores in impression management are associated with more effective false responses, meaning the time required to lie and the time required to tell the truth differ. Thus, results provide evidence in favor of the idea that the usual tendency to self-present in a positive light, which involved simulation to a large extent, is associated with faster false responses [20].

Zeller and Carmines [21] showed that acting skills, manipulation, impression management, sociability and anxiety do not predict the frequency of lying. Manipulative people feel less guilt when they lie, while sociable people feel more anxious and guilty. However, other studies have shown a connection between neuroticism and simulation scores [22].

The literature states, therefore, that the L scale, also called the lie scale, affirms desirable social behaviors, but which the vast majority of the population violates in informal behavior. This scale is indicative in the interpretation of the questionnaire.

## **2. Objectives and hypotheses**

The objectives that this study tries to aim are:

1. Identifying the existing differences among the Romanian and Korean respondents, regarding the response behaviour to the personality questionnaires.
2. Analysing the influence of certain cultural indicators, such as social values and norms, on adopting a desirable or undesirable response style in accordance with the social image created within that culture.
3. Assessing statistically the way that both Romanian and Korean subjects answered, through two personality questionnaires.
4. Investigating the existence of errors in response behaviour in order for subjects to maintain a socially desirable image.

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. We presume there are significant differences in social desirability regarding self-control between Romanian and Korean subjects;
2. We presume there are significant differences in the Lie Scale regarding responsibility and the level of study of the participants;
3. We presume there are significant differences between self-image management between Romanian and Korean subjects;
4. We presume there are significant differences between social conformism between Romanian and Korean subjects.

## **3. Sample and instruments**

A sample of 90 participants, 45 Romanian and 45 Korean, aged between 20 and 55 years of age, both male and female, have been assessed with The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and with California Personality Inventory (CPI). All subjects have given the written consent in order to participate to this study.

## **4. Results and discussions**

*Hypothesis 1:* We presume there are significant differences in social desirability regarding self-control between Romanian and Korean subjects.

We obtained an average of the differences between the variables  $= -4.267$ , statistically significant for  $p = .034$ . Thus the hypothesis is confirmed.

The intercultural study conducted by Williams, Satterwhite & Saiz [23], which aims at the desirable social response between East Asians and Italians, included socio-demographic variables, as well as personality at the individual level, taking into account the value dimensions at the country level. The main effects were found for self-control, negatively related to social desirability, as well as for extraversion, avoidance of uncertainty, distance from power and masculinity (positive correlations). In addition, the effect of self-control at the individual level was stronger among Asian respondents who have a higher level of education, where there is a well-established set of norms and social values that guide their actions and response behavior, the trait being more attenuated at respondents with a medium level of study, even among Italian subjects, who showed a higher level of extraversion. The study highlighted a minor rail control and an uninhibited Self of participants.

Those with a higher level of education reveal beliefs that suggest an average internal and external locus of control, which shows a significant difference in personal values and convictions, the type of early socialization, family and social environment. These differences influence self-control and have a more pronounced main effect in Asian respondents.

Also, other researches [17] show significant differences regarding two distinct ways of responding socially desirable in the two cultures. Social desirability was seen as a deception towards others (which highlights the tendency towards narcissism), in which the emphasis is on managing the impression of the rails and presenting a favorable rail image. Second, the researcher's work was done on the effects of questionnaire characteristics and personality traits on intercultural differences. The researchers' conclusions were somewhat equivalent to the studies conducted by Krosnick [24], [25] or Chang and Krosnick [26] who found a significant difference among Italian subjects with a higher level of study where the frequency of responses leads to self-control of behavior, emotions and daily actions, and a high level of social desirability.

*Hypothesis 2:* We presume there are significant differences in the Lie Scale regarding responsibility and the level of study of the participants.

We obtained the average of the differences between the variables = -4.150, significant for  $p=.004$ . Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed.

Peng, Spencer-Rodgers and Zhong [27] assessed the relationship between certain personality traits, including responsibility, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and socio-demographic characteristics (gender, level of education and background) with the primary objective of analyzing respondents' behavior in North Korea (the Hang-won region) and in France (the region of Marseilles). The researchers observed that there are two types of lies (self-directed lies and others-oriented lies) that are related to different personality traits, with responsibility being relevant. The results suggest that French respondents with a higher level of education are more manipulative, and are perceived as responsible and able to make relevant decisions, more concerned with how they present themselves to others and more sociable. Subjects with a medium level of study in Hang-won, even those in Marseille, appreciated that the obligation to do something, to respond, to account for something, to accept an bear the consequences, to take responsibility for their actions is an elementary feature, but the frequency of socially desirable responses to the trait of responsibility indicated a low level of social responsibility. The items that verified the sincerity of respondents to this trait have revealed that the average level influences the behavior of higher level subjects, which are more interested in how they will be perceived. This states that they have initiative and are involved in daily activities; they take responsibility, while those with a medium level show some disinterest or indifference in this regard.

Other studies [28] also investigated whether individual differences in certain personality traits are related to concealment skills. The authors examined the possibility that differences in socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and level of education may influence the time required to tell the truth or a lie about information, about a certain personality trait, including the degree of responsibility. The authors anticipated a positive relationship between the time required to tell a lie, the level of study of the respondents and the scores on the Lie scale, due to the usual response patterns.

However, this prediction was not confirmed by data obtained by the data obtained by Heine et al. [22]. They showed that acting skills, manipulation, impression management, sociability and anxiety do not predict the frequency of lying. The same study showed that manipulative people feel less guilt when they lie, while anxious and sociable people feel more guilt. Another study highlighted a connection between higher education and simulation scores for individual and social responsibility [5]. This study included subjects from Norway and China, each country being represented by a sample of 200 participants. The results showed that both respondents in Norway and China, with a high level of education, who graduated from college or master's degree, were concerned about how they are viewed in society, if they are considered responsible and if they are compared to subjects who have a high level of education. Subjects with average studies have a more pronounced predisposition to reputable, façade errors that influence response behavior.

Regarding the existence of differences between responsibility and the level of study, the results show that the Lie scale in EPQ-R strongly correlates with the Impression Management scale in BIDR. This result is consistent with previous studies that have also suggested this relationship [18], [29]. It has also been observed that higher scores in impression management are associated with more effective false responses, for example the time required to lie and the time required to tell the truth, especially in subjects with a higher level of education.

There have been psychologists who want to deepen the subject of the difference in terms of the trait of responsibility suggested exclusively by subjects with a higher level of education and a culture in which the family and social environment were based on a philosophy of life, dominated by rules and values. They scientifically addressed the question: to what extent such differences exist?, how large are they in size? To answer these questions, psychologists often rely on an indicator, the d-Cohen coefficient, which shows how big the difference between groups is in relation to the variability within these groups. As a comparison, a d-Cohen of 0.2 is considered small, 0.5 is considered medium, and 0.8 or higher is considered a high value. To provide some comparison, intercultural studies show [30] a d-Cohen coefficient for the average difference between Asian and European cultures in terms of responsibility of 0.18. In Asian culture, women with a higher level of education provide a higher degree of socio-professional and personal responsibility, of about 0.60, compared to Asian and European men, both with average and higher education. In the case of European women, the difference is about 1.7.

*Hypothesis 3:* We presume there are significant differences between self-image management between Romanian and Korean subjects. We used the Independent samples T-test and we obtained  $t=6.658$ ,  $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=.000$ . The hypothesis was confirmed.

Studies that show similar results validate our hypothesis [31], [32]. Significant differences were recorded within the EPQ, on the variables gender and level of study. Researchers concluded that in Asian countries, where work-related values and principles are well crystallized, especially among subjects with a higher level of education, there is a tendency towards greater self-deception, their behavior revealing a predominant tendency towards

impression management, compared with other nations, for example the European, represented by the Italians.

It has been shown that the results on the impression management scale correlate very well with the results on the Lie scale in the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. Both the sample of Asian and European women with high level of education, where less frustrated, due to their academic training, that compensates for this feeling through the impression of good reputation (in the attempt to look pleasant, competent or to do more than it is strictly necessary).

The results showed that respondents from urban areas with an average level of education tell more lies when they have a self-presentational purpose. Men and women tell the same amount of lies, but they differ according to the self-presentational purpose.

*Hypothesis 4:* We presume there are significant differences between social conformism between Romanian and Korean subjects. We obtained  $t = 2.847$ , significant for  $p = .007$ . Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed.

Family has an important role in perpetuating traditional stereotypes, behaviors, attitudes or social interactions. In most Chinese families [33], girls are the ones who have to do the housework without revolting, adopting a submissive character. Their chores include: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, arranging meals, washing dishes, ironing clothes, while the most common activity among boys is to make small repairs around the house. The coercion and strictness in Chinese families is high.

Japanese men also appreciate that they do everything their parents tell them, without retaliating or complaining, because they respect the elders that contributed to their growth and education. They perform even tasks of gardening or animal carrying. In opposition, European subjects show a more defiant attitude towards what they were told to do as children. If the family contributes substantially to the differentiation between men and women, and between cultures as expected, it is primarily the family environment that enshrines these differences, by differentiating roles based on the division of labor between the sexes.

In intercultural studies with Korean and American participants [34], [35] it was found that the main source of additional work for women is domestic work, a feature present in each sample, that women fulfill without hesitation. For western subjects, who have a more flexible mentality, they live in a more democratic or permissive family environment that allows them to refuse sometimes certain chores.

## 5. Conclusions

After consulting the literature and research in the field we came to the conclusion that the response to personality questionnaires is a psychosocial phenomenon that still manifests itself with predilection in any area of human and social activity, as there is a tendency towards certain bias. Good reputation, the desirable way to present oneself, is a factor that influences the façade effect.

The significance of the L scale does not meet a consensus of opinions. Different authors interpret the high scores as:

- Insincerity, in which case the scale is used as an indicator to validate the evidence.
- A measure of the concealment behavior, a tendency to successfully deceive, in which case the scale expresses a certain stability of personality.
- A certain degree of naivety and social immaturity, a measure of social conformity, the tendency to accept as true what is socially desirable, in which case the scale expresses an informal behavior.

The research we conducted on Romanian and Korean subjects found that there are significant differences between participants' response styles, the level of study being a variable that

highlighted these differences. Participants with higher level of education adopted a response style aimed at social desirability.

Romanian subjects with a medium level of education reported a submissive style of response, demonstrating a tendency towards conformity, compared to the higher educational level respondents who showed an independent character, self-control and a sense of personal and professional responsibility.

This comparative intercultural study provided consistent information about the conceptions and values implemented in the two cultures. In the Korean culture there is a tendency to put oneself in a favorable light when it comes to situations when respondents had to prove maturity and social responsibility. The Romanian culture highlights a tendency toward social conformity, in the case of the respondents with secondary education. Participants with higher education expressed a more uninhibited response behavior.

This research also showed that response styles can be seen as communication styles, as ways in which participants present themselves.

In both Romanian and Korean samples, at the individual level, it is found that people who are more sociable, more manipulative, have higher scores on the scales of social desirability. Subjects who have a higher tendency to self-present tend to show a smaller difference between the time it takes to tell a lie and the time it takes to tell the truth, especially because of the usual response patterns. In other words, people who tend to use simulating behaviors will perform better to simulation tasks.

Following the statistical processing and interpretation of the data, we identified that the strongest influence for the development of response behavior is the social conformity that appeared in the family and level of study of the participants. Parents are the ones who pass on to their children, directly or indirectly, their own beliefs about life and society. The overview of the impact that parental influence has on the development of response behavior has led to the view that an orientation towards a response style that highlights social desirability could be more beneficial to the reputation of the whole family.

Both Korean and Romanian participants experienced the process of socialization and response styles through which they relate to themselves through conformity/submissive attitude or, on the contrary, independence and realization of one's own requirement or living standards.

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