

Cultural differences in perception



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The cultural influence of difference in focus and categorization In the research article, “ The influence of culture: holistic versus analytic perception” provided by Richard E. Nisbett and Yuri Miyamoto, there is evidence that perceptual processes are influenced by culture. The research found that Western cultures focus on salient objects and use rules and categorization for purposes of organizing the environment, whereas, East Asian cultures focus more holistically on relationships and similarities among the objects when organizing the environment.

In an illustrative study both rural Chinese and American children were shown a picture of a man, a woman, and a baby. The Chinese children tended to group the woman and the baby because of the relationship between the two, a woman takes care of a baby. American children tended to group the man and the woman because they are both adults. The results indicated that culture influences late stages of perception and categorization.

In another study East Asians and European Americans were presented with the Rod-and-Frame Test. In this test a rod or line is shown inside a frame, which can be rotated around the rod. The participants were asked to state when the rod appeared vertical even if the position of the frame was in a different position. The East Asian participants made more errors than the European American participants. This indicated that the East Asians were attending more to the whole field which made it difficult to ignore the frame.

It was found that East Asians not only attended more to the field, but they noticed it earlier, remembered more about it, and related the object to the field in memory. Additional evidence that Asians pay more attention to context comes from work by Masuda and Nisbett. They presented American

and Japanese participants with two animated pictures of a farm. The two pictures had various small differences in details. Some of the changes differed in focal objects and other changes were made in the field and relationships between objects.

The findings showed small differences in styles of attending to information in the environment. In conclusion Nisbett and Miyamoto found, “ considerable evidence that shows that Asians are inclined to attend to, perceive and remember contexts and relationships whereas Westerners are more likely to attend to, perceive and remember the attributes of salient objects and their category memberships” (Paragraph 10). Eye-movements during scene perception In the past hundred years, cultural differences in perceptual judgment and memory have been observed.

It has been found that Westerners pay more attention to focal object whereas East Asians pay more attention to contextual information. Hannah Faye Chua, Julie E. Boland, and Richard E. Nisbett wrote a research article, “ Cultural variation in eye movement during scene perception” in which they studied such cultural differences. They examined the possibility that the differences came from culturally different viewing patterns when confronted with a nature scene.

The authors did so by measuring the eye movements of both American cultured individuals and Chinese cultured individuals while they viewed photographs with a focal object in a complex background. They found that the Americans fixated more on focal objects and the Chinese participants paid more attention to the background. It appeared to Nisbett, Boland, and

Chua that the differences in judgment and memory may have come from differences in what is actually attended as people view a picture.

In the study performed by Nisbett, Boland, and Chua participants were asked to sit in front of a computer screen with a head-mounted eye-movement tracker. The individual would start the session by looking at a plus sign in the middle of a black screen followed by a scenic picture. The findings from study Easterners and Westerners differ in assigning information to objects versus backgrounds. The East Asians were less likely to correctly recognize old foregrounded objects when presented in new back grounds.

Providing more evidence that East Asians appear to bind objects with backgrounds in perception. Therefore the cultural differences in visual memory are likely caused by how people from Eastern and Western cultures view scenes and are not only due to cultural norms. American participants looked at the foregrounded object sooner and longer than the Chinese whereas the Chinese looked more at the background than the Americans did. It is thought that this is due to the fact that East Asians live in relatively complex social networks. Thus, attention to context is important for effective functioning.

Westerners, however, live in less constraining social worlds that stress independence which allows them to pay less attention to context. Thought habits in different cultures In the research done by Nisbett and his colleges it is found that individuals not only think about different things but think differently over all. In all the studies it was found that Easterners think more holistically, paying more attention to context and relationship and relying

more on experience-based knowledge than abstract logic and showed more tolerance for contradiction.

Westerners are more analytic, tending to detach objects from their context to avoid contradiction. They relied heavily on formal logic. The Asian participants in the studies showed greater attention to the background of scenes than the objects in the background whereas the Americans showed greater attention to the objects. When it came to interpreting events in the social world, the Asians seemed similarly sensitive to context more quickly than the Americans did. This can cause different views when perceiving world events.