
A TOOL FOR ASSESSING GLOBALISATION AFFINITY AMONG GROUPS OF SPECIFIC CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS *

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To investigate cultural lifestyle preferences in different cultural contexts, a forced-choice questionnaire was constructed, based on Thurstone's Law of Comparative Judgement, an almost forgotten statistical method of 1927, which is a useful tool for assessing groups. This study's questionnaire items targeted job and living conditions in the spectrum from traditional to globalised lifestyles. Subjects were indigenous representatives at the UNO in Geneva, and students in Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and Germany. The preferences ascertained reflect attitudes on a scale ranging from very traditional to very globalised lifestyles. Although being an uncommon assessment tool, Thurstone's Comparative Judgement indicates to yield highly valid outcomes, as the results of the African university students, though from three different countries, resembled each other, but were complementary to the results of the indigenous representatives, which, in turn, mirrored the Berlin controls' profiles, according to expectations. Findings are discussed in light of the Symbolic Self-Completion Theory.

Keywords: *globalisation assessment, comparative judgement, symbolic self-completion, cross-cultural.*

Theoretical Background

The Law of Comparative Judgement

The basic idea of the Law of Comparative Judgement, as proposed by Thurstone (1927), is that repeated assessments of an object or of a stimulus are theoretically not identical, but normally distributed around a focal value. This is claimed to hold true for repeated assessments of an object or of a stimulus made by the same person, as well as for repeated assessments of the same object or stimulus made by several persons. If two comparable objects or stimuli are assessed, then the differences of these assessments are normally distributed too.

When we expand this to more than two objects or stimuli, in order to compare their assessments, each of these objects or stimuli is tested against each other. This is done by way of a forced-choice questionnaire, in which a subject has to choose one out of two alternatives, which are offered as pairs each time.

The first step yields a frequency distribution, showing each instance of each presented object or stimulus being presented with each alternative, and also showing how often in each of the instances the object or stimulus presented was favoured over the alternative presented. These preference frequencies are then, in the second step, trans-

formed into relative frequencies. In further steps, the z-values finally lead to scale values as measures of the preference of each object or stimulus in comparison to the other objects or stimuli.

This procedure is known as the Thurstone method of paired comparisons. It has proven helpful for assessing culture-related differences (e.g., Allison *et al.* 1999). Here, it shall be shown that the method of paired-comparison scaling is a useful tool for measuring cultural lifestyle preferences of persons within the spectrum reaching from traditional culture to a globalised context.

Motivational Factors of Globalisation

Cultural changes are evident in the presently globalising world. These changes, as we see them in progressive modernization, are effects of human behaviour and interaction. Human behaviour, in turn, is determined by cognitive and motivational factors. Thus, cultural changes go along with changes in cognitive patterns, which are interlinked with, and influenced by, processes that take place in the external context.

Emergence of Cultural Dominance

Cultural changes are triggered by the overlap of hitherto separate cultural systems. Examples can easily be found in paradigms such as language (Cherubim 1975), architecture, music, or food (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). As long as a cultural group is not exposed to factors that bring about any need for change, it represents a stable system that perseveres in its current state. However, when members of such a cultural group are confronted with members of another cultural group, they perceive alternatives to their own cultural elements, which up to that point had been but singularly known to one cultural group. Through the encounter, the individuals of each cultural system become aware of the alternative behavioural patterns of the respective others (Groh 1993a, 1993b).

These patterns, as well as any cultural element or artefact, correspond to cognitive elements. During the synthesis of the overlapping cultures, equivalent elements of either side are weighed against each other. Those that are considered effective are approved, whilst the equivalent others are dismissed. On the one hand, due to this mechanism a culture has a greater overall effectiveness if it results from many preceding syntheses, because with each synthesis selection processes take place with regard to the elements contributed by the respective cultures going into synthesis with each other. On the other hand, a culture without such a record of syntheses in its history has not accumulated a comparable store of effective cultural – and at the same time cognitive – elements with their respective behavioural patterns.

When a culture of the first kind (many preceding syntheses, high overall effectiveness) comes into contact with a culture of the second kind (less preceding syntheses, less overall effectiveness), cultural dominance results as an effect of this contrast. On the individual level, a person exposed to that dominance strives for strategies to mitigate the feeling of inferiority (Groh 2005, 2018).

Symbolic Self-Completion

According to the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion as proposed by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), an individual tries to bridge the gap between the ideal self, defined by personal goals, and the actual self, as realistically perceived, with the help of sym-

bols. These symbols are communicated, and they have the function of creating an impression in orientation towards the aspired, identity-relevant goals. If, for example, a person believes, for whatever reason, that tennis is an important thing in life, although he or she is not a top-ranking tennis player, then there is a dissonance in the sense of an incompleteness, which he or she will try to reduce with the help of symbols (hence the name of the theory) that he or she communicates to others. The communication of the symbols can be of verbal, visual, or various other natures. The person could invest time and money by taking tennis lessons; he or she could invest just money and buy tennis wear, targeted at creating the impression of being very much involved with tennis; or, when lacking financial resources, he or she could just invest time by speaking a lot about tennis, thus urging people as to the importance of tennis, thereby likewise attempting to create the impression of being a tennis expert. With all of these behaviour patterns, the person aims at being seen as closer to the identity goal. This serves as a compensation for a lack of capabilities as perceived with regard to those identity goals that are seen as relevant by that person (Braun 1990).

The Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion is of great importance when it comes to explaining cultural change in a globalising world. This can easily be shown within the difference of the so-called North (social systems of European style) and South (indigenous, non-European social systems). Whereas the North picks up only very few cultural elements from the South, there are radical changes taking place in the South, where, at least in urban settings, a majority of its cultural elements are being replaced by those from the North. In the terminology of the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion, Southern individuals feel inferior when confronted with Northern life style. However, within the constellation of cultural dominance, which the North exerts over the South, Northern cultural elements are widely regarded as attractive. Conceding attractiveness to a life-style, which is different from one's own, implies, in another terminology, cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), and a need for its reduction. Thus, the identity-goal for Southerners feeling inferior in that sense, would be to become like a Northerner (n.b. vice-versa, Northerners generally would not like to become like Southerners, since that would mean losing their dominant position). The lack, as perceived by a Southerner with regard to his or her self, is a lack of Northern characteristics, as manifest in cultural elements or behaviour patterns. Again, under the perspective of the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion, what is important is the communication of symbols. Though the individual might strive to become like a Northerner, he or she would try to compensate for the supposed lack. Such a compensation often takes place through the acquisition of material symbols (Braun and Wicklund 1989).

Attractiveness of the Globalised World?

At first sight, it seems to be logical that people want to be on the side that is dominant, because otherwise, they would be in an inferior position, which to avoid can be seen as a natural reaction. However, cognition enables us to reflect the processes of cultural change critically and on meta levels. The state of a cultural system and its contextual relations are subject to interpretations. Inferiority is one of them, but in the indigenous discourse,¹ a long-term perspective is often taken, questioning the sense of globalisation and pointing at globally destabilising effects arising from the dominance of the First

World, such as the destruction of nature and climate change. Since 2006, these positions are backed by the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, it can be expected that indigenous representatives at the UN will not unreflectingly take a position in favour of globalisation.

Under the aspect of social-cognitive approaches it depends on his or her position within the social setting, whether or not an individual takes a critical position towards the problems of globalisation. Especially under the aspect of the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion, the commitment the individual has taken is decisive for his or her further behaviour, be it the claiming of a traditional identity or in the direction of globalisation. Gollwitzer (1986) points out that striving for an identity, as is manifest in self-symbolising, is a non-strategic behaviour pattern, which may not be confused with strategic self-presentation.

Cultural Determinants

Individuals internalise behaviour patterns and cognitive elements that are available within their context of socialisation. Cultures can be positioned within a theoretical spectrum, with indigenous cultures being at one end, and globalised social systems being at the other end. Accordingly, the position of an individual is affected by his or her cultural background, which can be located within that spectrum. The position of a culture within the spectrum, in turn, is a result of historical processes, which have led to resources of behaviour patterns within that specific culture, that account for its characteristics. We should bear in mind that culture is not an autonomous entity, but that it is composed of people. Their behaviour and cognitions are determined by their collective memory and communications that are specific to that social system they had been born into (Assmann 1992).

If we try to reconstruct the emergence of globalised from formerly non-globalised culture, then we can find processes of accumulation (due to cultural syntheses) on the one hand, and loss of cultural information (due to selection processes) on the other (Groh 1993a, 1993b). The overall effectiveness of the dominant and presently globalising industrial culture only contains strategies that have been relevant in the previous course of its history; it does not contain strategies outside its scope. Indigenous cultures, in turn, have a very specific effectiveness within their context with regard to knowledge and strategies, which the industrial culture does not have, like how to manage habitats and complex ecological systems. It can be assumed that the extent to which an individual feels attracted to the globalising industrial culture depends on his or her specific cognitions. Yet, it is often taken as a premise that people prefer the dominant First World culture, without having an empirical foundation for such a proposition.

This study presents a way of measuring the extent to which persons of specific backgrounds feel attracted to globalised culture, by means of a tool that is based on the method of paired comparisons, and a discussion of the outcome from the perspective of the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion.

Method

Questionnaire

Characterisations of cultural lifestyles, briefly describing job and living conditions, were rank scaled within a continuum reaching from very traditional to very globalised situations. The items were as follows:

- ‘Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area’ (a),
- ‘Small business in a minor 3rd World town’ (s),
- ‘Middle-class job in a 3rd World city’ (m),
- ‘High-class job in a major 3rd World City’ (hc),
- ‘High-tech job in a 1st World city’ (ht).

In Cameroon and in Geneva, translations of the original English questionnaire were used parallel to the English version. These parallel versions, which had been provided by official translators at the United Nations in Geneva, were the French translation in Cameroon, and French and Spanish translations in Geneva. Minor adjustments had been made for Africa, reading ‘African’ instead of ‘3rd World’, and for the University of Ibadan in item (m), ‘Ibadan’ instead of ‘a 3rd World city’. The questionnaire is shown in the appendix (Fig. 2).

Subjects and Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to students at the Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (N = 63; mean age: 29.15, SD = 7.59; 55.9 per cent male, 44.1 per cent female), to indigenous representatives during a session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the UNHCHR at the United Nations in Geneva (N = 35; mean age: 37.1, SD = 11.45; 71.4 per cent male, 28.6 per cent female), to students at the Universities of Yaoundé and Buea, Cameroon (N = 128, 108 students at Université Yaoundé I and 20 students at the University of Buea; mean age: 22.31, SD = 3.06; 62.7 per cent male, 37.3 per cent female), to students at the University of Limpopo, South Africa (N = 53; mean age: 20.15, SD = 2.14; 51.0 per cent male, 49.0 per cent female) and to students in Berlin, Germany (N = 81, 77 students at the Technical University and 4 students at Humboldt University; mean age: 22.62, SD = 3.18; 65.8 per cent male, 34.2 per cent female). From the collected data, preferences were calculated according to the Law of Comparative Judgement (Bortz and Döring 2003). For details of the procedure, see above (section on *The Law of Comparative Judgement*).

Results

The data gathered from the African students show very similar patterns, with the fourth item on the scale, (hc), being on rank 1 of the preferences, and the first item, (a), being on the lowest rank. This holds true for the data gathered in Nigeria, Cameroon, and South Africa.

Both the data of the indigenous representatives at the UN and the data of the TU Berlin students show very different patterns: In the UN data, the fifth item, (ht), is on the lowest, and the first item, (a), is on top rank. Thus, the results of the indigenous representatives show a nearly inverted distribution in comparison to those of the students in Africa. In the Berlin data, the fifth item, (ht), is on rank 1 of the preferences, and the

second item, (s), is on bottom position, so that this distribution, in turn, is also almost laterally inverted when compared to the UN data (Fig. 1).

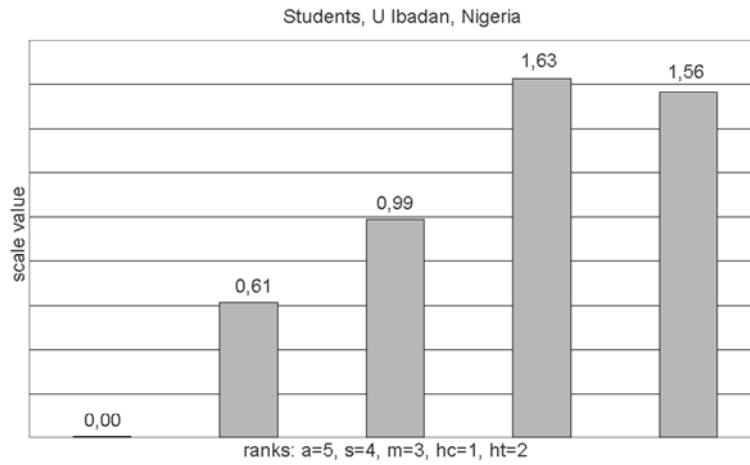


Fig. 1 (a). Lifestyle preferences found in Nigeria

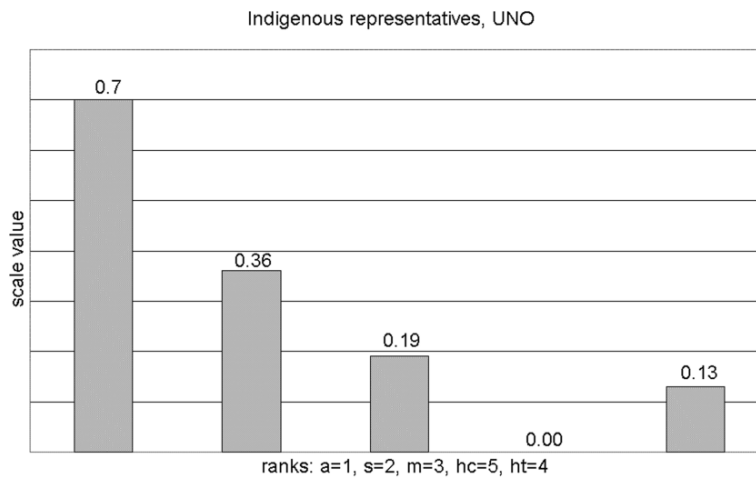


Fig. 1 (b). Lifestyle preferences found among indigenous representatives at the UN

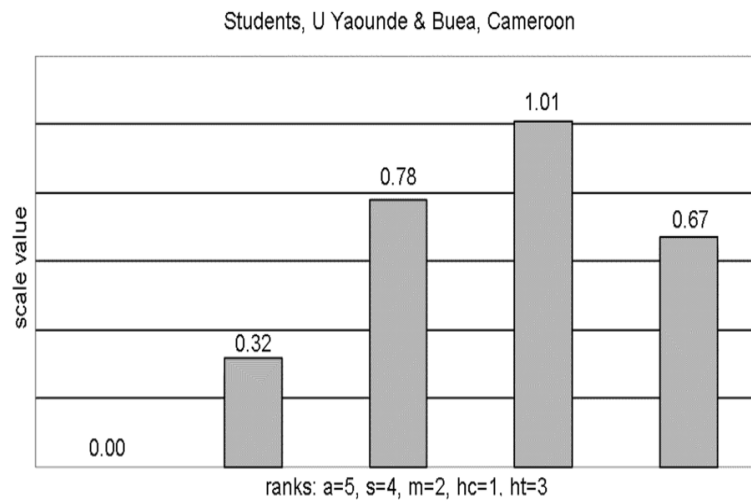


Fig. 1 (c). Lifestyle preferences found in Cameroon

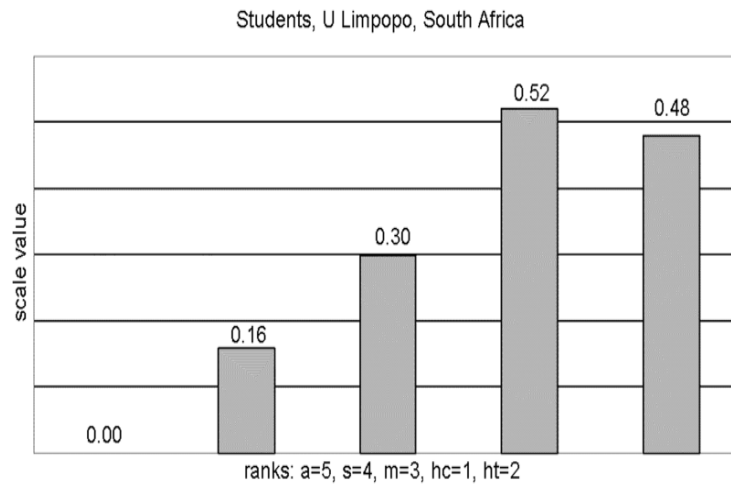


Fig. 1 (d). Lifestyle preferences found in South Africa

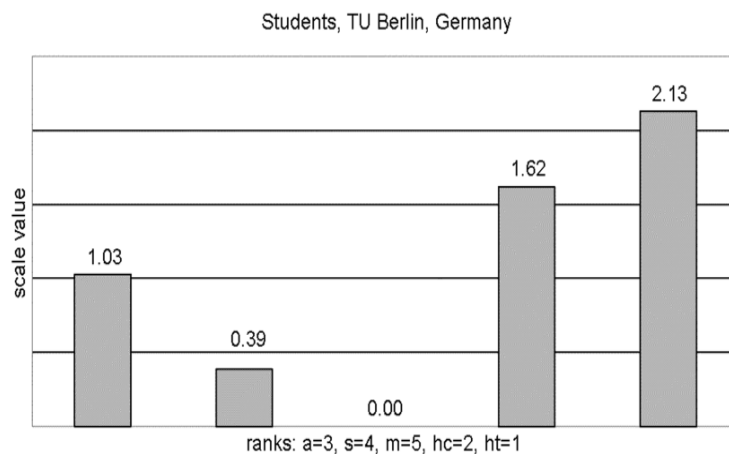


Fig. 1 (e). Lifestyle preferences found in Germany

Figure 1 (a-e): Scale values

Conclusions

The validity of the results obtained with the tool presented is underlined by several aspects. First, the data of the African students yielded nearly equal profiles with regard to the three different countries. Second, the indigenous representatives' data, in sharp contrast to the former ones, reflect positions explicitly claimed by that group. And third, the data of the Berlin students strongly reflect their positions, which they implicitly claim by studying in a capital of the industrialised world.

Whereas for the other groups, the life roles and goals are rather blended, the roles and goals of the Berlin students, who can be seen as a control group, are quite clear; by definition, they strive for a 'High-tech job in a 1st World city', especially as most of the students of that sample study at the Technical University (see above, Subjects and Procedure). Consequently, the preference of the Berlin students for a 'High-tech job in a 1st World city' accounts for the validity of the instrument. Also, their data is well compatible with the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion, since they reflect the claim for a 'high-tech' identity. Likewise, Braun and Wicklund (1988) had shown that among students, the striving for a professional identity is reflected in respective claims, which serve as symbols to complete the yet incomplete identity. On the other hand, the item, 'Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area', in third place, can be interpreted as the effect of the counterbalancing idea of a very different lifestyle, contrasting to the industrialised world.

Similarly, the same item ('Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area') being in the top position in the UN data reflects the claim of the indigenous representatives; anything else would be contradictory to their role, since they have been sent by their communities to demand recognition and respect for their indigenous cultures. The indigenous representatives' claim is completely reflected in the ranks of their preferences.

Strikingly, the data of the African students, who actually *are* indigenous as well, are exactly contrary to the data of those, who represent indigenous peoples within a globalised context. The attractiveness of the First World is evident in the African students' data, and is only slightly counterbalanced by the maintenance of an African identity, as which the fact can be interpreted that not (ht), but just (hc) is in their top ranking position. Attention should be paid to the fact that African students are by no means representatives of their cultures of origin. Rather, they belong to a very small upper class that contrasts very much with the large majority of the population. Due to colonial history, European life style is usually regarded by the Third World's upper class as a standard to strive for. This means that people from this segment generally aspire to abandon traditions - in contrast to the subjects surveyed at the UN. This study, therefore, cast severe doubt on all cross-cultural surveys that rely on data collected from Third World university student samples, since these subjects are a minority within their societies, following very different values, as pointed out by our results.

The method of paired comparisons has proved to be a useful tool for the assessment of culture-related preferences. This application of the Law of Comparative Judgement also clarifies that preferences of specific job and living conditions result from various internal and external factors. Therefore, any interpretation of such data should always consider that the results are determined by the specific individual-context constellation, in which goal-related, compensatory and other cognitive factors take effect.

NOTE

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¹ At UN level, cf. relevant communications *e.g.*, at URL <http://ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/IndigenousPeoplesIndex.aspx>.

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Appendix

Investigation of Comparative Judgement
regarding job & living preferences

date: _____
place: _____
interviewer: _____

Profession: Age Sex m f

My place of origin is a village / a town / a city.

My culture: My mother tongue is

In my place of origin, there was ... (please tick)

	tap-water	electricity
in my early childhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
when I was a teenager	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

From the pairs of alternatives presented, please chose each time the *one* that you prefer:

<input type="checkbox"/> Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Small business in a minor 3rd World town
<input type="checkbox"/> Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle-class job in 3rd World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-class job in a major 3rd World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-tech job in a 1st World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Small business in a minor 3rd World town	or	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle-class job in 3rd World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Small business in a minor 3rd World town	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-class job in a major 3rd World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Small business in a minor 3rd World town	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-tech job in a 1st World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle-class job in 3rd World city	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-class job in a major 3rd World city
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle-class job in 3rd World city	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-tech job in a 1st World city
<input type="checkbox"/> High-class job in a major 3rd World city	or	<input type="checkbox"/> High-tech job in a 1st World city

Fig. 1. The forced-choice questionnaire