

A cross-cultural analysis of teachers' and parents' perception of and attitudes toward conflict situations: An attributional approach

AKEMI KURACHI

Department of Letters, Ritsumeikan University, Kita-ku, Kyoto 603

Teachers and mothers in Japan and the United States were shown three critical incidents involving a typical type of conflict between a mother and a teacher relating to the hypothetical mother's child. The subjects were asked what the mother in the situation would feel and how she would behave. A sample of 400 parents and teachers located in five geographic locations in each country were given the questionnaire. A total of 304 usable responses were analyzed. In order to distinguish between the responses of American mothers, American teachers, Japanese mothers and Japanese teachers, discriminant analyses were carried out for each incident. Almost all the first discriminant functions distinguished sharply between the American and Japanese groups. In addition, ANOVAs and ANCOVAs were carried out for each incident with culture and role as subject classification factors. The results showed differences in patterns of response which can be attributed to differences in culture. These findings have implications for and raise several fundamental questions about the educational systems and the educational policies of both countries.

Key words: role functions, interpersonal perceptions, perceptual attributions, behavioral attributions, conflict situations, critical incidents.

Little research has been conducted to examine the mother's interpersonal relationships with teachers and other adults who share responsibility for socialization. Tanner (1978) reports that the relationship between mothers and teachers in Japan is more harmonious than in the United States and suggests that the degree of harmony between the contributes to children's achievement in school. Further many Japanologists, particularly, Westerners have argued that the success of Japanese industrial and commercial ventures is primarily a consequence of the Japanese ethos of group orientation which, they claim, has been perpetuated in Japan's long history. However, such claims of interpersonal support and harmony are disputed by others.

Befu (1980) has argued that Westerners often hold a simplistic view about "Japanese groupism". He describes methodological problems in the existing literature which advocates "Japanese Groupism".

A common problem is the tendency to put too much emphasis on observable behavior while ignoring the inner feelings. This perspective strongly suggests a methodological approach which includes analysis of feelings as well as behavior in comparative studies of Japanese and other cultures.

Using a projective approach, De Vos (1973) found that "—the Japanese understand and aware of one another's covert attitudes in spite of the surface control, whether the hidden feelings are intense anger, or profound sorrow. Women, in particular, are still expected to practice restraint over their impulse to anger or discord" (p. 36). This suggests that a useful approach to studies of socialization in Japan and the United States would be to examine attributions by mothers and teachers, and their perceptions about children, and about each other, because these are a clue to their inner feelings about situations involving children. Combining this with the desirability to focus on situa-

tions in which the child receives conflicting messages from both parents and teachers, this suggests, in turn, that it would be useful to examine mothers' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward situations triggered by critical incidents involving a child at school, in which that incident is given conflicting evaluations by the child's mother and teacher. This paper reports data from a larger study (Kurachi, 1983, 1984a, b) designed to explore attribution and interpersonal perceptions of teachers and mothers in common school situations in Japan and the United States.

Method

Teachers and parents (mothers) in both countries were shown a set of critical incidents involving a typical type of conflict between a mother and a teacher involving the mother's child. They were asked what the mother in the hypothetical situation would feel and how she would behave in order to gain insight into their attributions to the conflict in the story. A sample of 400 parents and teachers located in five geographic locations in each country were given the questionnaire. A total of 304 usable responses were obtained with almost equal numbers of teachers and mothers in each country. The subjects were Japanese and American mothers of preschool children and Japanese and American preschool teachers.

Using a seven point scale subjects were asked to respond to 24 statements describing the story mothers' likely feeling and actions. Twelve statements described feelings (perceptual attributions), 12 described possible actions (behavioral attributions), and the same 24 statements were used for each incident. The instrument was constructed using culture assimilator methodology and attribution theory. Individual items and three incidents were developed through four pilot studies over a two year period. Back translation was used to ensure item equivalence in the two countries.

The English version of the questionnaire for Incident II is shown in Table 1, and the results for individual items for this incident are given in Table 2. Incident I involved a mother asking her child's teacher how she could accelerate the progress of her child, when the child showed little motivation to learn, and the teacher showed little interest. Incident III depicted a situation where a child gives an embarrassing response to the teacher in front of all the mothers on visitation day.

For the ANOVAs, the twelve perceptual (mother-would-feel) questions were used to compute three locus of responsibility scores, viz., teacher-locus, self-locus, and child-locus. From the 12 behavioral (mother-would-do) questions, three scores were derived measuring three categories, defined in terms of Leary's four dimensions (1955, 1957): dominance, submissiveness, associativeness (cooperativeness), and dissociativeness. (See Table 3.)

Results

Discriminant Analyses

In order to distinguish the responses of American mothers, American teachers, Japanese mothers and Japanese teachers, discriminant analyses were carried out for each incident. Almost all the first discriminant functions distinguished sharply between American and Japanese groups (see Fig. 1) and there were many other regularities across the incidents. Certain items distinguished powerfully between Japanese and Americans. For example, in the analysis of the perceptual scores of incident II, where the child forgot to bring a form to school, the first discriminant function explained 85% of the variance. It loaded highly negatively on perceptual items 12 ("ashamed") and 9 ("regret for not . . . fulfilling her obligation") and positively on perceptual item 8 ("upset with the teacher"). Thus, the groups scoring high on this dimension, that is, the

Table 1

Incident #2

Mike is a 5-year-old boy. He was supposed to bring home a form from school so his parents could fill it in and have Mike return it to his teacher today. Mike forgot the form, and when he returned home, he told his mother that the teacher had gotten very angry and had scolded him in front of all his classmates because he had forgotten the form.

How do you think the mother of the child in this situation would react? There are a number of possible reactions listed below. Please circle the number on the scale of 1-7 for each reaction (1 represents the least likely reaction and 7 represents the most likely reaction). Please do not leave any item blank. There may be cases in which reactions seem to overlap or be repetitive, however, please disregard this and give a likelihood score to each item (a-x) listed.

	← likelihood →						
	most likely						least likely
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
The mother would feel:							
a) guilty	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
b) disappointed with the teacher	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
c) concerned about classroom management	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
d) upset by the child's inadequacy/inferiority/failure	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
e) responsible & that she should do something for the child	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
f) disappointed with her child	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
g) concerned about the child's problem & ability	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
h) upset with the teacher	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
i) regret for not fulfilling her obligation to the child	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
j) ashamed because the child was not interested in learning/the child did not do as expected	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
k) doubt about the teacher's ability	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
l) ashamed	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
The mother would (do):							
m) have negative feelings toward the teacher but not take any action	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
n) confront the teacher & point out that her action and/or judgment was inappropriate	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
o) ask the teacher for help/assistance	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
p) accept the teacher's judgment and attitude	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
q) complain to the principal & demand action be taken	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
r) share feelings of discontent about the teacher with other parents and/or family, but not take any action	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
s) feel that the teacher was incompetent and oppose the teacher's action/judgment	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
t) tell the child that the teacher was wrong in her action/judgment	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
u) lose her confidence in the teacher/distrust the teacher	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
v) reprimand the child in order to please the teacher	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
w) respect the teacher's judgment	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
x) teach the child as she believes, not directly challenging the teacher	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

American mothers and teachers, could be characterized by their low endorsement of feeling ashamed and self-regret and high

endorsement of feeling upset with the teachers. In other words, Americans followed a tendency to blame teachers as

Table
Means and standard deviations of all four subject

Group		p1	p2	p3	p4	p5
1 (AM)	<i>M</i>	2.364	5.977	5.205	2.091	3.727
	<i>SD</i>	(1.954)	(1.532)	(1.875)	(1.567)	(2.306)
2 (AT)	<i>M</i>	3.097	5.258	4.355	2.968	3.742
	<i>SD</i>	(1.989)	(1.692)	(1.942)	(1.426)	(1.390)
3 (JM)	<i>M</i>	5.103	4.676	3.985	2.603	4.397
	<i>SD</i>	(1.763)	(2.062)	(2.127)	(1.622)	(1.772)
4 (JT)	<i>M</i>	4.673	4.308	3.923	3.096	4.462
	<i>SD</i>	(1.833)	(1.874)	(1.690)	(1.498)	(1.514)

Table 3

Categories of I Perceptual Attributions, "P", and II Behavioral Attributions, "B", derived from pilot studies

I Perceptual Attribution "P" (The mother would feel:)

a) *Self-locus*

p1^{a)} guilty

p5 responsible that she should do something for the child

p9 regret for not fulfilling her obligation to the child

p12 ashamed

b) *Teacher-locus*

p2 disappointed with the teacher

p3 concerned about classroom management

p8 upset with the teacher

p11 doubt about the teacher's ability

c) *Child-locus*

p4 upset by the child's inadequacy/inferiority/failure

p6 disappointed with her child

p7 concerned about her child's problem and the child's ability

p10 ashamed because the child was not interested in learning/the child did not do as she expected

II Behavioral Attribution "B" (The mother would do:)

a) *Dominant-Dissociative (DD)*

b2 confront the teacher and point out that her action/judgment was inappropriate

b5 complain to the principal and demand action be taken

b7 feel that the teacher was incompetent and oppose the teacher's actions/judgment

b12 teach the child as she believes, not directly challenging the teacher

b) *Submissive-Dissociative (SD)*

b1 have negative feelings toward the teacher but not take any action

b6 share feelings of discontent about the teacher with other parents and/or family, but not take any action

b8 tell the child that the teacher was wrong in her action

b9 lose her confidence in the teacher/distrust the teacher's judgment

c) *Submissive-Associative (SA)*

b3 ask the teacher for help/assistance

b4 accept the teacher's judgment and attitude

b10 reprimand the child in order to please the teacher

b11 respect the teacher's judgment

^{a)} These numbers correspond to the alphabetically coded items on the original questionnaire as follows: p1=a, p2=b, p3=c, p4=d, p5=e, p6=f, p7=g, p8=h, p9=i, p10=j, p11=k, p12=l, b1=m, b2=n, b3=o, b4=p, b5=q, b6=r, b7=s, b8=t, b9=u, b10=v, b11=w, and b12=x.

2
groups on the 12 attribution variables in incident II

Variable						
p6	p7	p8	p9	p10	p11	p12
2.136	2.727	5.818	2.659	1.568	4.545	1.386
(1.608)	(2.150)	(1.674)	(2.112)	(1.043)	(2.246)	(0.945)
2.903	3.000	5.323	3.355	2.290	3.871	1.968
(1.422)	(1.528)	(1.536)	(1.684)	(1.216)	(1.784)	(1.169)
1.956	2.559	4.000	5.662	2.912	3.750	4.029
(1.239)	(1.687)	(2.137)	(1.698)	(1.922)	(2.154)	(1.977)
2.365	2.712	4.635	5.173	2.846	3.442	4.346
(1.221)	(1.460)	(1.794)	(1.665)	(1.552)	(1.809)	(1.781)

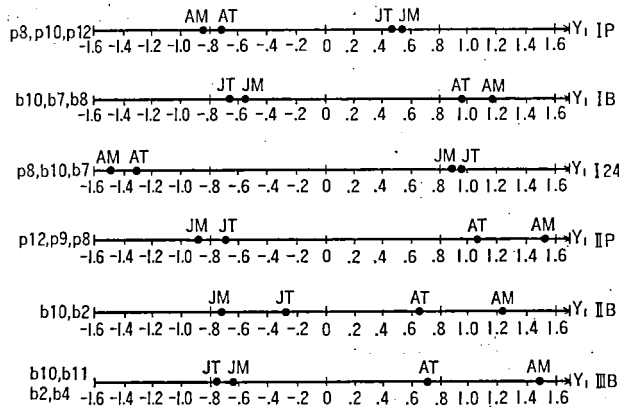


Fig. 1. Configurations of subject group centroids on first discriminant functions in the six discriminant analyses.

Note: p8, p10, . . . : Item loading highly on the discriminant function. I, II, III: Incident I, II, III. P: Perceptual analysis. B: Behavioral analysis. 24: Analysis of the 24 attribution scores (perceptual and behavioral items combined).

opposed to a tendency to seek the source of responsibility for the incident in oneself as parent (exemplified by the Japanese). These differences are understandable in terms of the ethos of both cultures. In America, the basic question in the incident would be whether the fact that the form was not brought to school was the mother's fault. If so, the mother would tend to take personal responsibility for the event, otherwise not. On the other hand, in Japan, the mother would take personal responsibility no matter whose fault it was that the form was not brought to school. (In

Table 2, these differences are expressed in the relatively high scores on perceptual items 9 and 12, indicating self-blame.) This is consistent with De Vos' general view (1963) that the character of the Japanese woman includes a pronounced propensity for self-blame.

More generally, many of the discriminant analyses suggested that Japanese mothers felt ashamed of themselves when their children experienced school problems, while American mothers were upset with the teacher. Japanese teachers also expected the mother in the situation to feel

shame, while American teachers expected the mother to blame the teacher. When behavioral attributions are considered, both the Japanese mothers and teachers believed that the mother in the story would likely reprimand the child to please the teacher, while American mothers and teachers thought the story mother would be unlikely to do this. In response to two of the three incidents, the American mothers and teachers instead thought that the mother in the story would likely confront the teacher and point out the inappropriateness of her behavior. When one compares the degree of similarity between teachers' and mother's perceptions in the two countries, one finds that the Japanese teachers' and mothers' interpretations are more similar than are those of their American counterparts. As a whole, American teachers and American mothers differed in that the mothers systematically adopted a more extreme attitude for each incident than did the teachers.

Another part of the analysis examined relationships between perceptual and behavioral attributions for all four groups (mothers and teachers in both countries). The main finding here was that the pattern of these relationships differed markedly across situations for American mothers and teachers, but was similar across situations for Japanese respondents. The Japanese respondents indicated that the mother would feel upset with the teacher, yet would also attempt to please the teacher, while the American respondents were even more likely to indicate that the mother would be upset with the teacher but were much less likely to say she would attempt to please the teacher.

ANOVA and ANCOVA

In addition to discriminant analyses, ANOVAs and ANCOVAs were carried out for each incident with culture and role as subject classification factors. (For convenience, in the ANOVAs of perceptual scores, for example, the three locus of re-

sponsibility variables were considered to be repeated measures, but the analyses were checked by appropriate MANOVAs with few differences in the significant results.) In the ANOVAs, the culture main effect was almost always very significant while the role main effect was sometimes significant. All Culture×Attributional Emphasis (B×D) interactions were significant at least at the .000 001 level in all six

Table 4
Significant effects in the ANOVAs of the perceptual scores in incidents I, II, and III

Source	Incident		
	I	II	III
Culture (B)	**	*****	****
Role (C)			***
B×C			*
Emphasis (D)	*****	*****	*****
B×D	*****	*****	*****
C×D	**	**	*
B×C×D	***		

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$
 **** $p < .0001$
 ***** $p < .000 01$
 ***** $p < .000 001$

Table 5
Significant effects in the ANOVAs of the behavioral scores in incidents I, II, and III

Source	Incident		
	I	II	III
Culture (B)		*	***
Role (C)	***		
B×C		*	
Emphasis (D)	*****	*****	*****
B×D	*****	*****	*****
C×D		*	*****
B×C×D			

* $p < .05$
 *** $p < .001$
 ***** $p < .000 001$

ANOVAs. Role \times Attributional Emphasis (C \times D) interaction effects were significant in five of the six ANOVAs. (See Tables 4 and 5.) Perhaps the most interesting of the interaction effects was the finding that the emphasis on self, teacher, and child loci were different across cultures at a very high level of significance, as was the difference in the pattern of behavioral attribution. If we compare the Culture \times Perceptual Attributional Emphasis and Culture \times Behavioral Attributional Emphasis, that is, if we compare American and Japanese perceptual profiles on one hand and their behavioral profile on the other hand, we see that in the perceptual profiles the Japanese are more focused on self-locus (that is self-locus plays a different role in their profiles), while in the behavioral profiles they are less focused on dominant behaviors (that is dominant behaviors plays a different role in their profile than in the American profile).

ANCOVAs were performed to see whether the above effects might have been due to differences in age, income or education. The relationships with virtually all of the covariates were insignificant. As a result, the findings do not appear to be affected by such differences between the groups.

Discussion

Examination of response profiles of specific subject groups on the derived variables and/or individual items made possible a psychodynamic analysis of concrete conflict situations. In addition, it enabled us to document some of the differences in the ways in which social and educational processes are understood and responded to in the two cultures. The particular method for trying to obtain a more dynamic understanding of subjects' feelings, emotions, and motivations in specific situations, which was used in the present study, opens up a fruitful avenue to deepen existing approaches to the study of multiple

childrearing systems, which emphasize normative standards, expectations, and judgments (Tanner, 1977; Winetsky, 1978; Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, & Dickson, 1980). For example, the different forms of the relationships among teachers, mothers and their children and a different perception of this relationship by both teachers and mothers in two countries are major contributions. A more dynamic situational understanding, including an understanding of possibly discrepant inner feelings and actions, is necessary if one considers transplanting the ideas and methods of education of one country to other (e.g., recent attempts to introduce cooperative dynamics from Japanese models into American elementary classrooms). An understanding at this level is also needed if we are to help people from one culture make suitable adjustments when they live in the other culture and send their children to school there.

References

- Befu, H. 1980 A critique of the group model of Japanese society. *Social Analysis*, 5, 29-43.
- De Vos, G. 1963 The relation of guilt towards parents to achievement and arranged marriage among the Japanese. *Psychiatry*, 23, 287-301.
- De Vos, G. 1973 *Socialization for achievement: Essays on the cultural psychology of Japanese*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Hess, R., Kashiwagi, K., Azuma, H., Price, G., & Dickson, P. 1980 Maternal expectation for mastery of developmental tasks in Japan and U.S. *International Journal of Psychology*, 15, 259-271.
- Kurachi, A. 1983 A cross-cultural study of maternal perceptual attributions and behavioral attributions by parents and teachers in Japan and the United States: Dynamic situational paradigm of childrearing research (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1982). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 43, 9-A, 2939. (University Microfilms No. 8302917)
- Kurachi, A. 1984a Reactions to an incident involving a child in school. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 15, 321-336.

- Kurachi, A. 1984b *Japanese and American mothers' and teachers' reactions to incidents involving a child in school*. Paper presented in an annual meeting of American Education Research Association at New Orleans.
- Leary, T. 1955 The theory and measurement methodology of interpersonal communication. *Psychiatry*, **18**, 147-161.
- Leary, T. 1957 *Interpersonal diagnosis of personality*. New York: Ronald Press.
- Tanner, G. 1978 Expectations of Japanese and American parents and teachers for the adjustment of kindergarten children: A cross-cultural study (Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, 1977). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, **39**, 1-A, 116. (University Microfilms No. 7810121)
- Winetsky, C. 1978 Comparisons of preferences for self-direction or conformity among parents and teachers of preschool aged children: A study of values (Doctoral Dissertaion, Stanford University, 1977). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, **38**, 9-A, 5739. (University Microfilms No. 7802256)

(Received Nov. 15, 1986;
accepted March 14, 1987)