Title: Indigenization does not mean disintegration: A unity model of psychological research

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Indigenization Does Not Mean Disintegration: A Unity Model of Psychological Research

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Abstract: Towards indigenization in psychology does not mean towards separatism or revivalism. It is merely a "contrast-call" to draw the attention of psychologists to other existing social and cultural settings. It is a process towards the integration of all disciplines of psychology. Indigenous psychologists use their linguistic abilities and cultural experiences to discover new psychological variables. When it is necessary, they design new research methods to trace specific behaviors and thinking patterns in their cultures. These discoveries are subject to the development of a global understanding of psychology or psychological science. Indigenous studies occur within our present cultural settings. They look into the insufficiencies of the contemporary psychological theories, and supplement them with knowledge gained from other social and cultural environments. To illustrate this, a unity model of psychological research and an empirical example are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous psychology began to take its form in the Eighth International Conference of Cross-Cultural Psychology which was held in Istanbul in 1986 (Kagitcibasi, 1987). Its main themes concern the study of psychology and the active participation of psychological researchers in the Third World. It aims to accompany cross-cultural psychology in searching for new variables in social and cultural settings other than those of the advanced and industrial cultures, and to compensate for insufficient findings of early psychological research and theories. Indigenous psychology is indispensable for a global understanding of psychological phenomena. It draws the
attention of both psychologists of advanced and developing countries to collaborative and interdisciplinary research work. It provides a basis for appropriate trainings of psychologists in developing countries, especially of those in Africa and Asia, in the context of their natural social and environmental settings. It follows an implicit objective to integrate psychological knowledge of all disciplines. Its ultimate goal is to unify insights of mainstream as well as applied psychology in a more encompassing scientific study of mankind.

WHAT IS INDIGENIZATION?

Indigenization is not disintegration. It is a new way to discover phenomena that have not been realized. It is a process of searching for hidden psychological variables. Indigenous psychologists possess competence to detect new features within their cultural settings which might be overlooked by other psychologists. They use their cultural experiences and linguistic competencies as extra "tools".

Suitable transformations of knowledge: Indigenization is neither revivalism (if the traditional is positively viewed and the imported is negatively viewed) (Sinha, 1992) nor does it add additional national boundaries (Sinha, 1989). Indigenization in psychology, according to Durgenand Sinha who has presented a thorough elaboration on this topic in the Ninth and Tenth International Conferences of Cross-Cultural Psychology (Sinha, 1989 and Sinha, 1992), "would mean carrying out transformations in the scientific psychology imported from the West in such a moment that it takes on a character suited to the social-cultural milieu of the country" (Sinha, 1989, p. 20).

A methodological orientation: For Cigdem Kagblcbasi (1992), indigenization is a methodological orientation. It is similar to the emic approach proposed by cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. John W. Berry, 1989) for studying psychological phenomena. Between indigenous and universalist approaches there are dynamic and bilateral linkages, "In theoretical terms they are complementary" (Kagitcibasi, 1992, p.33).

Individuals growing up in one culture tend to develop that culture's psychological qualities. Indigenous or emic psychology refers to cultural psychology in Berry's terms (1985). It discovers "similarities
and differences among individuals developing under different and independent cultural conditions and links these conditions to psychological variation" (Berry, 1985, p.5).

A global understanding: Indigenization opens up the possibility to see objective reality (the structure of a situation as it actually exists) from the levels of subjective reality (the situation as perceived by an individual) and of social reality (the structure of a situation as it is perceived by a collective or group of interacting individuals). These three types of realities exist side by side and interact with each other (Kleiner and Okeke, 1991). Indigenous psychology helps to investigate these interactions, and to establish linkages between these realities for a global understanding of objective reality. Indigenous realities (in Kagitcibasi's term, 1992) or cultural psychologies (in Berry's term, 1985) are not end-states, but, are useful models for conceptualization, analysis and comparison. The study of indigenous realities could eventually lead to the universal understanding (Kagitcibasi, 1992, p. 34), and act as a basis for generating an universal psychology (Berry, 1985).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIGENIZATION IN PSYCHOLOGY

Setting equilibrium: Indigenous psychology provides the opportunity to generate innovative methodologies which are appropriate to the non-Western cultures. It sets an counter-balance to the overemphasized and biased usage of foreign methodologies.

Using native competence: Being a science of mankind, psychology should reflect the studies of human beings and their interactions with the natural environments. Each society (or culture) has its uniqueness. The implicit meanings of non-verbal and verbal communication can be discovered if a researcher possesses cultural experiences and language competence in additional to ample theoretical knowledge of psychology, and experiences in conducting surveys. These skills are neither transferable nor replaceable on a short-term basis. Long-term investments (e.g. through learning and socialization) are needed to equip one with an understanding of the implicit signs of communication in a culture. Indigenous or native psychologists have this kind of potential.
Fulfilling new needs: Rapid economical growth in some of the non-Western countries calls for the search for new methods of investigation and for new explanations of modern social and psychological problems. New complex problems (e.g. migration and ecological problems) need interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g. psychology and environmental science).

Showing the whole pie: Indigenization in psychology encourages non-Western psychologists to be independent and to have the courage to perceive their own societies from their own frameworks. With their efforts, the “disclosure” of non-Western cultures can be done in a more objective manner. Relying too heavily on the limited English language publications can lead to a biased and incomplete perceptions of the whole.

Increasing local psychologists’ expertise: There are too few trained and full-time psychologists from developing countries (Rosenzweig, 1992). It is indispensable, in the long-run, to train local psychologists. Such trainings should be conceived in accordance to the contemporary needs of the society. In addition to the use of conventional psychological techniques, new or supplementary should be developed within the contexts of the native environments. Alternate training locations between local (e.g. the Third World) and foreign countries (e.g. the USA, Western Europe) are planned. If the latter provides better and more advanced resources (Moghaddam and Taylor, 1987).

INTERRELATIONS OF INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Indigenization does not mean separation from mainstream psychology. The major role of indigenous research is to “dig out” hidden information, and then to combine it with information from other disciplines. From the standpoint of cross-cultural psychology, the study of indigenous features may lead to knowledge about common (universal, etc) features of numerous cultures. Cross-indigenous studies provide these insights. Intra-relations between indigenous features and inter-relations between indigenous and universal features are essential areas to be investigated. These interactive effects should be considered when formulating
CONDUCTING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Indigenous research should reflect contemporary needs and life styles. It is not a study of antiquated Eastern beliefs and out-dated philosophical thoughts. If research demands interdisciplinary expertise and teamwork, its team members should be balanced with respect not only to psychological qualifications, but also to cultural experiences and language competencies in the target culture(s). In addition, existing methods or survey materials suitable to the target culture(s) should be adopted selectively. Appropriate, innovative techniques and creative models should be introduced, whenever necessary. Surveys should be conducted as close as possible to the natural settings. More importantly, the subjects of the study should, to some extent, be familiar with the research theme.

A UNITY MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

\[ \text{Note:} \]
\[ R(I) \text{ research methods for indigenous study} \]
\[ R(G) \text{ research methods for general study} \]
\[ P(I) \text{ indigenous (emic) psychological phenomena} \]
\[ P(G) \text{ general (etic) psychological phenomena} \]
\[ C(S) \text{ culture-specific features} \]
\[ C(U) \text{ culture-universal features} \]
\[ M \text{ psychological models} \]
\[ T \text{ psychological theories} \]

One of the definitions of the term "discipline" is "a branch of
instruction or learning” (Oxford American Dictionary, p. 244). Indigenous psychology, mainstream psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and other applied psychologies are various disciplines of psychology. Interdisciplinary communication (practical perspective) at the research method level is essential. It expands the capacity to deal with existing problems (Mittelstrass, 1993). However, it should be done selectively in reference to, for instance, conceptual and methodological similarities (Kaufmann, 1987). Interdisciplinarity concerns both theoretical and research structures. In the theoretical perspective, unity is the keyword because science defines itself in terms of its unifying principles (mainly with respect to language, law, and method) (Mittelstrass, 1993).

Psychologists who focus more on specific features between groups or cultures follow the research line: R(I)-P(I)-C(S)-M (see Figure 1). This kind of study is commonly known as the emic approach in cross-cultural psychology. Those who emphasize general features between groups or cultures choose the R(G)-P(G)-C(U)-M linkage. It is also known as the etic approach in cross-cultural psychology. A global understanding of psychology should not be limited to either of these approaches. It should cover both indigenous (emic) and general (etic) aspects. Dynamic and bilateral relations between R-M, M-T, and R-T are indispensable. Between R(I)-R(G), P(I)-P(G), and C(I)-C(U) exist mutual interactions. R, M, and T are subject to modification according to the needs and changes of cultural, social, and psychological situations. The development of research methods, models, and theories is continuous. Multifaceted and integrated approaches are important not only in indigenous studies but also in mainstream and applied psychological research. Cross-cultural and cross-domain (interdisciplinary) research methods are essential for the investigation of intervening relationships between psychological, social, and cultural variables. The entire process involves diversification and integration. At divergent stages, sub-models or perhaps sub-theories are designed. At the integrated stages, unifying theories are proposed. Extreme generalizations of interpreted results from the R-P-M linkage should be strongly avoided.

An empirical example: Technical creativity is a relatively new research theme in both Western and non-Western cultures. This concept was studied in four cultures: Germany, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. In pilot studies, technical students were asked to write
down their opinions on this concept. They were allowed to use diagrams to represent their ideas. Few Asian students represented their ideas with diagrams. Some Japanese students nominated a name for the concept, without the use of descriptions. Some Malaysian students related technical creativity to productivity and economical growth. German students were the most likely to write down their opinions. On some occasions, the researcher interviewed the subjects after they had filled out the questionnaires, in order to find out whether they were familiar with the theme being investigated. The most frequent indigenous (emic) and cross-indigenous (etic) descriptions were chosen and combined into a questionnaire. The appropriateness of these items to describe the concept of technical creativity was evaluated on the basis of a 7-Likert scale. Universal and culture-specific structures of technical creativity were discovered in these cultures (Tan, 1993). A control group consisting of non-technical students participated in the same study. Both technical and non-technical students agreed that IQ was the least appropriate item to use to in describing technical creativity.

REFERENCES


