Cultural Differences and Similarities among German-, French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland and Neighboring Countries

Simon Egli, Boris Mayer, & Fred Mast

University of Bern
Institute of Psychology
Language and Culture

> “Language is both the vehicle of most of cross-cultural research and part of its object. Language is the most clearly recognizable part of culture and the part that has lent itself most readily to systematic study and theory-building”
Hofstede (1980, p. 34)

> Switzerland is not one culture as such but a country encompassing at least three distinguishable subcultures:
  — German-speaking Switzerland
  — French-speaking Switzerland
  — Italian-speaking Switzerland
Individualism-Collectivism and Its Discontents

> Most attention of Cross-cultural research has been on the Individualism-Collectivism paradigm

> Danger of using I-C as a “catchall” construct (Kağitçibaşi, 2007, p. 53)

> Schwartz’s “autonomy-embeddedness” dimension or ”interdependence-independence” more appropriate

> Three family models that lead to different self-construals (Kağitçibaşi, 2007; Mayer, 2013)
  — Model of Interdependence
  — Model of Independence
  — Model of Psychological/Emotional Interdependence
The Family in “German”, ”French” and ”Italian” Culture

- The prototypical Italian and French family are closer to the Model of Psychological/Emotional Interdependence
  - Italian family (Barzini, 1990; Kohn, 1977)
  - French family (Kağıtçibaşı, 2007; Sabatier & Lannegrand-Williams, 2005)

- The prototypical German family more reflective of Model of Independence prevalent in modernized societies
  - Independent family value patterns in German mothers and their adolescent children (Mayer, Trommsdorff, Kağıtçibaşı, & Mishra, 2012)
  - German parents offer more choices and fewer constraints on children than French parents (Sabatier & Lannegrand-Williams, 2005)

- Swiss linguistic regions expected to mirror the differences among Italian, French, and German family models
Indicators of Family Models

Operationalization based on several items from the *European Values Study* (European Values Study, 2011) and the *World Values Survey* (World Values Survey, 2009)

1. Child qualities as indicators of a more embedded versus more autonomous family model (Schwartz, 1994, 2006)
   — obedience, unselfishness and hard work $\rightarrow$ **Interdependence**
   — independence and imagination $\rightarrow$ **Independence**

2. Intergenerational commitment values
   — Unconditional respect for parents and Intergenerational support
     High $\rightarrow$ **Interdependence**
     Low $\rightarrow$ **Independence**
Data

> European Values Study (fourth Wave)
  — N (Germany) = 2’075
  — N (France) = 1’570
  — N (Italy) = 1’500
  — N (Switzerland) = 1’272 (968 German-speaking, 268 French-speaking, 36 Italian-speaking)

> World Values Survey (Wave 5)
  — N (Germany) = 2’064
  — N (France) = 1’001
  — N (Italy) = 1’012
  — N (Switzerland) = 1’241 (633 German-speaking, 408 French-speaking, 200 Italian-speaking)
Qualities in Children

**Q52** Here is a list of qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: Code not more than five!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>v170 Good manners</td>
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<td>v171 Independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>v172 Hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v173 Feeling of responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>v174 Imagination</td>
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<tr>
<td>v175 Tolerance and respect for other people</td>
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<td>v176 Thrift, saving money and things</td>
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<td>v177 Determination, perseverance</td>
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<td>v178 Religious faith</td>
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<td>v179 Unselfishness</td>
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<td>v180 Obedience</td>
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<td>v181 None (spontaneous)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Obedience

- Germany lower than Italy and France
- Analogous pattern for CH linguistic regions
- EVS & WVS very similar
Hard Work

**European Values Study (2008)**

- Italy
- France
- Swiss GER
- Swiss IT
- Swiss FR

**World Values Survey (2005)**

- Italy
- France
- Swiss GER
- Swiss IT
- Swiss FR

- Italian-speaking Swiss sample only exception to pattern
- French-speakers most likely to choose „Hard Work“ as important quality
Unselfishness

**European Values Study (2008)**

- Germany
- Italy
- France
- Swiss GER
- Swiss IT
- Swiss FR

**World Values Survey (2005)**

- Very low importance of „Unselfishness“ as child quality for Germans and German-speaking Swiss
Independence

- Germany higher than Italy and France
- CH linguistic regions analogous pattern
- EVS & WVS very similar
• Italians and Italian-speaking Swiss show lowest importance of „Imagination“ as a child quality
Family Attitudes

SHOW CARD 49 – READ OUT AND CODE ONE ANSWER ONLY

Q49 Which of these two statements do you tend to agree with?

A: Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one’s parents are, one must always love and respect them;
B: One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behaviour and attitudes

1 – Tend to agree with statement A
2 – Tend to agree with statement B
8 – don’t know (spontaneous)
9 – no answer (spontaneous)

SHOW CARD 50 – READ OUT AND CODE ONE ANSWER ONLY

Q50 Which of the following statements best describes your views about parents’, responsibilities to their children?

1 – Parents’ duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being
2 – Parents have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children
3 – neither (spontaneous)
8 – don’t know (spontaneous)
9 – no answer (spontaneous)
SHOW CARD 51 – READ OUT AND CODE ONE ANSWER ONLY

Q51 Which of the following statements best describes your views about responsibilities of grown children towards their parents when their parents are in need of long-term care?

1 – Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents even at the expense of their own well-being ................................................................. [A]

2 – Adult children have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their parents .........................................................[B]

3 – neither (spontaneous)
8 – don’t know (spontaneous)
9 – no answer (spontaneous)
'One Must Always Respect Parents Regardless of Faults’

- Italy highest, Germany lowest
- CH linguistic regions analogous pattern
'Parents Should Sacrifice for Children at Their Own Expense'

- Italy and France higher than Germany
- CH linguistic regions analogous pattern
‘Adult Children Have to Take Care of Parents’

- Italy highest, Germany lowest
- CH linguistic regions analogous pattern
Discussion & Summary

- The family and child-rearing are essential in understanding differences between German, French and Italian culture.

- A pattern corresponding to I-C can be found on the family level but not necessarily beyond.
  - E.g. Hofstede’s or Schwartz’s indices show little to no differentiation.

- Kağıtçibasi’s family models refine the I-C paradigm and provide a more thorough understanding of cultural differences.

- Intra-cultural differentiation in Switzerland similar to neighboring countries.
References


