A cross-cultural study on the development of understanding others
: An experimental approach

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People typically make trait inferences spontaneously when observing others' social behavior, without intentions or awareness (Uleman, Saribay, & Gonzalez, 2008). This spontaneous trait inference (STI) may be culturally influenced, because many studies on explicit inferences have demonstrated that Western people tend to emphasize dispositional aspects and East-Asians tend to emphasize situational aspects as the cause of social behaviors (e.g., Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Shimizu (2012) showed that STIs occurred among Japanese 5th-grade, 7th-grade, and university students, although their occurrence was associated with a trait valence factor. However, there has been no study that compared STIs of Westerners and East-Asians directly. Therefore, the current study is designed to explore cultural differences in the occurrence of STIs using American and Japanese participants.

Method

Participants and design. Thirty Japanese undergraduates from Saitama University and 29 American undergraduates from New York University. The experimental design was a 2 (country: Japan and U.S.) × 2 (trait valence: positive and negative) × 3 (trial type: hit, false recognition, and mismatch) mixed design ANOVA, with trait valence andtrial type as the within-participants variable.

Procedure. Participants first viewed photograph–behavior pairs on the computer screen in the exposure task. Half of the behaviors explicitly included a trait word that captured the essence of the event (e.g., "He is curious because he asked where the stars come from"). The other half of the behaviors implied but did not include a trait word (e.g., "He asked where the stars come from"). Then participants will engage in a confusion task designed to erase their short-term memory of stimuli in the exposure task. Finally participants were shown the same photographs in the exposure task, but this time they were each paired with a trait word. Participants were asked to indicate ("yes" or "no") whether the word actually appeared in the behavior previously shown with photograph in the exposure task. In inclusion trials, the trait

words were actually shown with the photograph earlier (hit rate). In the exclusion trials, the trait words were implied by the behavior description but did not appear in the description (false recognition rate). In the mismatch trials, the trait words that were presented neither were implied by behavior descriptions in the exposure task nor appeared in those descriptions (mismatch rate).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (country) $\times$ 2 (trait valence) $\times$ 3 (trial type) mixed ANOVA was performed using "yes" response rates as dependent variables (*Figure*). The main effects for country ($F(1,57) =$ 9.90, $p <.01$), trait valence ($F(1,57)=5.12$, $p<.05$) were significant. In addition, the interaction of
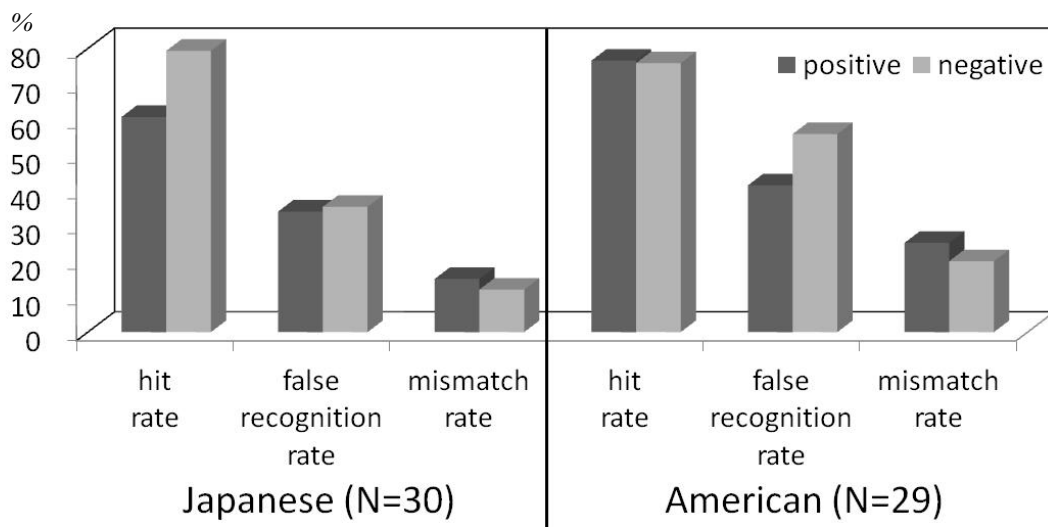

Figure. Mean values of "yes" reponses.

trait valence$\times$ trial ($F(1,57)=10.98$, $p<.01$) and country $\times$trait valence $\times$ trial ($F(1,57)=4.74$, $p<.05$) were also significant. The follow-up test revealed that the simple main effect for trait valence was significant in false recognition rate only among American participants. These results suggested that STIs occur both among Japanese and American participants, and the negativity effect was shown only among American participants.

References

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