

Analysis of the Cultural Dimensions of the United States and Its Enlightenment to English Teaching—Based on Hofstede’s Value Dimensions and Minkov’s Cultural Dimensions

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Abstract: In cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural teaching, the culture of the United States is important. Therefore, it is necessary to handle cultural differences with greater sensitivity. This paper aims to analyze the United States’ cultural dimensions by using Hofstede’s value dimensions and Minkov’s cultural dimension. It is found that the United States’ culture is significant in individualism, low uncertainty avoidance, low power distance, masculinity, indulgence, monumentalism and universalism, which are affected by the geographical factor, population, religion, history and wealth. It also provides an idea for English teaching.

Keywords: The United States’ Cultural Dimensions; Hofstede’s Value Dimensions; Minkov’s Cultural Dimensions; Pedagogical Implications

1. Introduction

The United States, as one of the world’s most strong country, has a significant impact on its culture. With the globalization, the importance of cross-cultural research and teaching has become increasingly prominent. Especially in the United States, cross-cultural research is particularly flourishing. However, there are still many problems to be solved. On the one hand, social phenomena under different cultures vary widely, and how to effectively compare and analyze them is difficult. On the other hand, new cultural phenomena poses new challenges to cross-cultural research.

In addition, there is little analysis of the American cross-cultural model from the perspective of Hofstede’s value dimension and Minkov’s cultural dimension. Therefore, this paper aims to make an analysis of the cultural dimension of the United States by using Hofstede’s value dimension and Minkov’s cultural dimension.

2. Analysis of the United States’ Cultural Dimensions

2.1 Individualism

Based on Hofsted’s value dimensions, the United States is inclined to individualism. Individualistic cultures emphasize personal rights and responsibilities, privacy, voicing one’s own opinion, freedom, innovation, and self-expression^[1]. Highly individualistic cultures believe individual is the most important unit. They encourage “I” mentality, competition, not dependent on organization and institutions, and making decisions based on individual^[2].

Hofstede’s findings indicate that the United States has a strong tendency toward individualism. Based on his study of the Individualism Values for Fifty Countries and Three Regions, the United States is ranked 1st^[3]. It can be known that the lower the number, the more individualistic the country is. Based on the lowest number, the United States is a highly individualistic country. Individualism in the United States is seen in the expectation that employees will change jobs in order to advance their careers. And there are three main factors which have influenced American individualism. First, geographical factor. Countries in high-altitude areas are more inclined to individualism. Second, Population. Countries with less population tend to be more individualistic. Third, Wealth. In theory, the richer countries tend to be more individualistic.

2.2 Low Uncertainty Avoidance

According to Hofstede, uncertainty avoidance can be defined as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations.”^[3] And there are high uncertainty avoidance and low uncertainty avoidance. The United States belongs to the second one, which tends to be tolerant of the unusual, be self-reliant and embrace difference or risk.

Hofstede’s findings prove that the United States belongs to the low uncertainty avoidance. Based on his study of the Uncertainty Avoidance Values for Fifty Countries and Three Regions, the United States is ranked 43rd^[3]. It can be known that a higher number is associated with a country that feels comfortable with uncertainty. With a high number, the United States belongs to the low uncertainty avoidance. For example, Americans are more likely to stimulate innovations and emphasize new ideas. This is related to its history and religious beliefs. The United States was originally a nation-state formed by a group of European Christian Protestant immigrants. In addition, the United States has a short history and belongs to an immigrant country. Many immigrants make it highly accepted for different cultures and languages. Besides, the United States is the most devout country of Christian faith in the world today. Christianity believes that death is a punishment for human crimes and a judgment that human beings must bear. Christians are brave to face this fact. Therefore, Americans have a greater ability to accept unknown uncertainties.

2.3 Low Power Distance

According to Hofstede, in countries with low power distance, it is believed that inequality in society should be minimized, and people expect autonomy and independence, challenging decisions when necessary. Also they tend to minimize class structures, minimize power position, respect for individuality and decentralized authority.

Hofstede’s findings prove that the United States has low power distance. Based on his study of the Power Distance Values for Fifty Countries and Three Regions, the United States is ranked 38rd^[3]. And a higher number is associated with a country that has low power distance culture. Therefore, the United States has low power distance. For example, high-level executives may remove their ties or suit coats when interacting with subordinates in an effort to signal equality.

There are also three main factors which influenced its low power distance. Firstly, geographical factor. Countries in high-altitude areas, such as the United States, Germany and Canada, are more inclined to low power distance. Second, Population. Countries with less population tend to be low power distance. Third, Wealth. The richer countries tend to be lower power distance.

2.4 Masculinity

According to Hofstede, masculinity is the extent to which the dominant values in a society are male oriented. The United States has a masculine-oriented culture which emphasizes ambition, acquisition of wealth, and differentiated gender roles. And masculine societies tend to see men as assertive and women as nurturing. Men tend to be competitive, visible, stress success, and vocation-oriented.

Hofstede’s findings prove that the United States has a masculinity society. Based on his study of the Masculinity Values for Fifty Countries and Three Regions, the United States is ranked 15rd^[3]. The lower the number, the more the country can be classified as one that favors masculine traits. The United States has the lower number which shows that it can be classified as one that prefers masculine traits. This can be reflected in the number of women holding public office in 2014. Women were elected to only ninety-nine (18.5 percent) of the 535 combined seats available in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives^[4].

Three main factors have influenced American masculinity. Firstly, geographical factor. Countries in high-altitude areas, such as the United States, Germany and Italy, are more inclined to masculinity. Second, Population. Countries with less population tend to masculinity. Third, Wealth. The richer countries tend to be masculine-oriented culture.

2.5 Indulgence

According to Minkov, in an indulgent society, people would place a priority on their sense of freedom and personal enjoyment through leisure time and interaction with friends.

And Minkov’s findings prove that the United States has indulgent culture. Based on his study of the Industry Versus Indulgence Order Ranking Scores for Forty-Three Countries, the United States has 399 score^[5]. It can be known from the table notes that a lower score denotes a preference for indulgent traits. The United States has a relatively lower number which shows that the United States can be classified as one that prefers indulgent traits. This explains why Americans pay more attention to personal freedom, and the entertainment in the United States is developing quickly.

Economic development is the main reason that affects this cultural phenomenon. Most underdeveloped nations place a high priority on industriousness, or hard work, while those countries with a developed economy tilt more toward leisure.

2.6 Monumentalism

Monumentalism describes cultures that exhibit individuals with a high level of self-pride along with “unchangeable identities, strong values, unshakable beliefs, and avoidance of personal duality and inconsistency.”^[5]

Minkov’s findings prove that the United States belongs to Monumentalism. Based on his study of the Monumentalism and Flexumility Scores for Forty-Three Countries, the United States has 572 score^[5]. Ranking in the upper middle of the scale reflects how Americans balance self-promotion and humility. And it is seen as favoring monumentalism traits. The success of Facebook in the United States can be interpreted as an example of the general acceptance of self-promotion.

2.7 Universalism

According to Minkov, members of universalist cultures tend to treat everyone the same regardless of group affiliation. And there are eight main characteristics which includes individuality, nuclear family common, equally, minimal group discrimination, agreements, strict safety procedures, high environmental concern and clear communication with everyone.

Minkov’s findings prove that the United States belongs to universalism. Based on his study of the Exclusionist and Universalist Scores for Forty-Three Selected Countries, the United States has 237 score^[5]. It can be known from the table notes that a lower score denotes a preference for universalism traits. Therefore, the United States prefers universalism traits. As is evident from the table, developed nations scale toward the universalism pole. In wealthy nations, people generally have greater personal income which facilitates self-reliance and reduces the need for help from others.

3. Enlightenment to English Teaching

In summary, the American cultural dimensions are marked by seven key characteristics: individualism, low uncertainty avoidance, low power distance, masculinity, indulgence, monumentalism and universalism. By delving into the historical, religious, economic, demographic, and geographical aspects of the United States, we can better comprehend the origins of these cultural dimensions.

In the English teaching, this understanding is invaluable. It suggests that educators should weave these cultural insights into their teaching methodologies. By doing so, they can foster an environment where students not only learn the language but also gain a nuanced understanding of the cultural backdrop against which it is spoken. This approach equips students with the ability to communicate across cultures with sensitivity and awareness, preparing them for the global stage where English serves as a common linguistic bridge. Moreover, it encourages students to reflect on their own cultural perspectives, promoting a more inclusive and respectful attitude towards cultural diversity in the classroom and beyond.

References:

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