Self-Representation -
The stories of Seoul students

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Module: 26703000 Mediality-oriented Approaches to Social Sciences
Seminar: Language, Culture and Communication
Instructor: Paul Martin Lauer
Winter semester 2019/2020
Submission date: 31.03.2020

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1. Our motivation in undertaking this research (Johanna Zoe Hartmann)

Our task this semester was to undertake our own qualitative research in terms of qualitative interviewing. It was an interesting undertaking, quite new for both of us, so it was a journey with ups and downs, new insights and learning new things. To start describing this journey, we would like to start from our motivations for taking this course and conducting this research. As we both have very different backgrounds, we will describe our motivation apart from each other.

Johanna's background and motivation:

I am originally from a small village in northern Germany, however I travelled a lot with my parents when I was younger and came in touch with a lot of different cultures. This course "Language, Culture and Communication" seemed to be a good opportunity for me to learn more about the diversity of cultures from a more scientific perspective. Furthermore, conducting qualitative research was something I have never done before. Therefore, I thought this seminar can help me broaden my horizon and learn more about qualitative research and how to conduct interviews myself.

Steven's background and motivation:

As a foreign student who studied abroad in Germany, I came across many local people and international students, so I learned more about their different cultural backgrounds. The Asian continent and Western world always seemed to have a wall to me that a lot of people do not have enough understanding about each other's cultural background and even most importantly the different variations of values. Therefore, studying the cultural aspects from different international students can help me to appreciate the unfamiliar values and knowledges in a correct way, so to help improve the process of globalisation in a fruitful and peaceful way. Furthermore, my sense of belonging and identity changed from Hong Kong to the worldwide citizen when I came to Lüneburg. Therefore, I have the desire to learn more about different cultures, and qualitative interviewing is a way not only to find out more about cultural aspects and values, but also about emotions and the stories behind these.

2. Researching details and analysing method (Steven Tsang Chun Leung)

When conducting the research, what we want to hear are stories because otherwise we will get common and plain information about a culture, listing the facts without opinion, perspective, and value behind it. So why are stories important? Stories can provide not only personal experiences but also knowledge. Interviewees are showing their feelings and feelings about one culture can be distinct from personal views. The other way to say, the interpretation of different things is different from person to person.

As different people have their own story to tell, these distinctions show when it comes to people who have a different cultural background, where the values and knowledge are influenced by their own growing up. Some of these stories may be very sensitive to the interviewee to express out loud and they are not willing to share. Therefore, communication

skills are an important element for conducting this research. Another factor that influences the interviewee's responds is the matter of motivation. If the motivation for the interview is told to the interviewee, their respond can be very formal and limited while deeper information or the true feelings or emotions might possibly be hidden. The answer might come along with an assumption of what the interviewer wants to hear. Answers may stay at the surface of the story they have given.

The reason pursuing the meaning behind the story is that the story is a myth to us as it is what shows the interviewee's own experiences and feelings. Not that trust is not constructed or connected with interviewee, but we do not know if the story really happened like the interviewee said. As mentioned on the previous paragraph, influenced answer may be given so that they can be formal and at the same time have the possibility factor that the respond they have given might have to present themselves in a good way, instead of what they really did or feel in order to make them look good. Therefore, receiving a story is not enough for us but also deeper information needs to be explored based on the story.

Exploring the aspects that hide behind the culture which can lead to a personal story, value and factor perspectives is our goal on this research. Therefore, based on this goal, the first detail is that no expectation was given to the interviewee at the beginning as our research should not be biased by certain assumptions. Pursuing a certain outcome is not what we want, but instead exploring the true self of a person.

Secondly, not repeating the answer that they give should be kept in mind. Repeating answer might emphasise a certain point and concept from their answer, that unconsciously tells the interviewee what direction we were looking for, i.e. leading them into a specific direction.

So to lead a conversation, creating an informal and casual atmosphere is the third detail that helps to build trust and a connection with the interviewee. People with a connection and who treat each other as friends can more openly share their stories and mind as well as deeper emotions along with their story, so that not only sympathy but empathy can be obtained with the one we talk to. When you make the interviewee feel that he/she is having a social conversation, not in an interview situation, it will not only show us in the reflection of the story but also our interviewee, so that we both learn more things. So, courage and trust are needed.

The fourth detail is that going in different directions with the respond they have given. It can provide more alternative stories. As different aspects can be involved in one respond or story, these can give us diverse aspects to explore. Therefore, how the direction has been chosen can help us go in further interviews to more deeply explore the aspects behind the stories. In order to do so, we have to remind us to think that 'when we ask this question, why he/she is giving this answer?'. Going in different directions, sometimes an interesting story can be found in the flat part of the answer. When similar questions asked one by one base on the stories that have been provided, similar turning points might also be found which makes the research outcome plain and lack of personal experience in it. Therefore, not interpreting the stories ourselves too often is a thing we have to bear in mind. At the same time, we are allowed to make a conclusion from the answer they have given, while trying to keep the

balance between over-interpretation and the lack of logical analysis. With this, each direction of the story can be laid out in a concrete way but not in the abstract way.

3. Who did we interview? (Johanna Zoe Hartmann)

We decided to interview Korean exchange students, mainly out of personal interest. Even though Johanna grew up in Europe, she was always interested in Asian culture and visited Thailand after graduating. So, she wanted to learn more about the diversity of Asian cultures. As a matter of fact, she had a special interest in interviewing Koreans, as she will spent her exchange semester in Seoul, South Korea and saw this as great opportunity to learn more about the culture she will live in in the future and to come in contact with Koreans.
As for Steven, he grew up in Hong Kong and is more connected to Asian culture which gave him already more insights. However, he has not been to many other Asian countries and known people that come from different Asian regions. He is from a world business city where, as he said, citizens mainly learn culture from media, which is not comprehensive even for other Asian countries. Therefore, he wanted to learn more specifics about the particular cultures of different parts of Asia where he can compare the cultures with where he grew up more precisely. He thought conducting researches with people who also come from Asia, would give help him to deepen his cultural background and maybe even make connections with the interviewees, so to say, meeting more friends.
The seminar already provided a space to find potential interviewees and made it easy to come into contact with Koreans. More specifically our interviewees were female and between 20 and 23 years old. They were all South Korean university students spending an exchange semester here in Germany at Leuphana Universität Lüneburg. In South Korea, they live in Seoul, the capital city and also grew up there. All interviewees visited girls-only high schools and went to university straight after graduating.
In total we interviewed two Korean Exchange Students. We did one joint interview with both interviewees, who we will name A and B for the sake of anonymity. With interviewee A, we conducted two follow-up interviews and then afterwards we conducted another follow-up interview with interviewee B.

4. Our research

4.1 What caught our interest in the beginning? (Johanna Zoe Hartmann)

As mentioned before, qualitative research was completely new to us. We were unsure of how to start interviewing people in order to get an interesting story out of them. In the end, we decided to jump into the cold water and just do it. In class and in the discussion with Micheal Dellwing, as well as through the book *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* by Edwards & Holland (2013), we learned that, in order to give our interviewees enough freedom to say whatever they think is important, we should not prepare any questions that already

lead into a certain direction. Rather, we should just let the interviewee lead us to a topic that is interesting enough to pursue further, meaning a sensitizing concept that emerges out of the stories they are telling us.
We conducted the first interview with two Korean exchange students, in order to create an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable enough to speak about their experiences, as we thought being interviewed individually by two others and in a language other than their native language, may make them uncomfortable. Through that we hoped to break the ice and establish some kind of relationship of trust with them so that we could proceed with individual interviews later on. We also tried to give our interviewees room to talk about whatever they wanted and about whatever they felt comfortable talking about. Therefore, we asked them just about what kind of experiences they had since they arrived in Germany and what they felt was different from South Korea and Seoul.
Surprisingly, one of the first topics that came up when asking about their experiences with cultural differences between South Korea and Germany, was the way our interviewees dress themselves here in Germany. They told us that they feel like they have more freedom with what they are wearing here in Germany because they do not feel like the surrounding people care about their appearance and will judge them like they would in their home surrounding of Seoul.

> *B: When I buy clothes [here in Germany], I don't care about my shape or others' sights. I only choose clothes that I like because no one is watching me […] and they're judging me more or less in Korea.*
> *--*
> *B: In Korea we always care about others sights, for others or my friends, so we always have some restricted area to like doing something because we always have the concern about others thinking, but in here they have a positive 'don't care of other'.*
> *A: More freedom to live.*

These quotes mainly show how the situation has been described. For us it was interesting to see that our interviewees felt in Korea they are being judged by others when they do not look/dress appropriately and that this seemed to be different here in Germany. Different enough that they perceived it important enough to mention it as one of the first things when being asked about differences between their home and their life here in Lüneburg. So, we thought that it might be interesting to go further into the direction of self-representation in the following interviews in order to find out more about why our interviewees felt like they have "more freedom to live" here than in their home society.

4.2 Following our sensitizing concept: Further investigation of self-representation (Johanna Zoe Hartmann)

Following our first interview, we did follow-up interviews with them individually. This time we tried to move the interview into the direction of self-representation by asking about different settings but still tried to give our interviewee enough space for answering. During the course of the interview, it evolved from being an interview-setting to more of a conversation, in which stories and thoughts were shared from both sides and not just from the side of our interviewee.

This lead us to the moment where we thought "huh, interesting", in one of the later interviews we had with interviewee A. It was a story about "ideal" and "normal" and how A tried to change her personality to fit more into the „ideal" image. Actually, the story does not describe just one particular moment but rather a long process taking place over several years.

> *A: I have one really old friend, best friend and I met here when I was seven years old. I was kind of very quiet kid and she was very active, outgoing kid, but I don't know how but we got really close to each other and spent a lot of time. And we went to the same elementary school. And around her there are a lot of friends because she was so outgoing and really funny, so everyone likes her and I'm just normal kid. I was kind of jealous of her because the better characteristics that people…I think the ideal characteristic is outgoing and if you're too quiet or not outgoing, people think that's not that good as outgoing person. So, at some point I followed her acts when I was young and tried to change my personality. At some point it changed naturally because I hung out with her, but at some point, I really tried to be an outgoing person. So, I think that's a story of how I changed showing myself because of others…to get other people's attention and love because outgoing is idealistic characteristic.*
> *I: You said you were just a normal kid, what does that mean for you?*
> *A: Normal kid? Like not so quiet but not so outgoing, like not that so fashionate, a little bit like a soft person, not very strict on something, like when you hear to do that and just do it. And not talk my opinion very strongly. […] Just average person in everything. Have no very distinct characteristic, like a circle.*
> *I: So you said that the ideal characteristic is to be outgoing…*
> *A: Yes in Korea, I think. Many people think outgoing is much better than the quiet…*
> *I: Was there a special situation in which you really felt that?*
> *A: Well if I, like pretend to act very outgoing and doing funny things, then I can feel people really like you and want to spend much time with me than just being quiet and with books.*
> *[…]*

A: But, actually I'm not doing that anymore. Actually, my characteristics can be really changed because I tried and I lived in that way.
I: What did you do to be more outgoing?
A: Like practice funny statements [to make other people laugh] […] and if they really laugh because of me I feel kind of proud of myself […]. I just want people with me to feel happy, so I think that's why I did that. But now after I graduated high school, still I love people laughing because of me because I like to make them happy, but I don't really have pressure about that. Now I'm trying to love myself, like just the natural myself and I think quiet and not outgoing is also very nice because every person is different.

There are several things that we thought are interesting here. What was most striking for us about this story is the use of words, meaning that she used the word "ideal" to describe the more outgoing personality, with which you make other people laugh and make them feel comfortable, so the focus is more on your surrounding than on yourself. But also, this would entail to not do everything exactly as you are being told to do it. Contrary to that, she used the word "normal" to describe the more introvert personality, in which you keep more to yourself. The next thing we perceived as interesting, was the urge to make the people surrounding you happy and comfortable, even to that degree, that our interviewee would try to change her personality and to practice jokes in order to make other people laugh. So, we asked ourselves the questions: "Why did she try to change her personality to become more 'ideal'? And why did she later decided not to do it anymore and re-focus more in herself and love herself?"
Following that, we tried to find out more about the setting which might have led to this situation and as it happened in school, we asked more about the school setting in Seoul, or more specifically, middle and girl's high school, as our interviewees both went to a girls high school. In the following interview with our second Interviewee B, we got something that, for us, came closest to a thick description.

I: What was your high school experience like?
B: Just for me? Actually, I had a really big problem when I was in middle school, so I really didn't study much, so I went to a girl high school and in Seoul there are a lot of girl high schools. And in general, the girl high schools are just focused on studying. So, when I went there the school is really strict. Every day the teacher checked our faces with tissue, like do we put our sun creams or not because we cannot put anything on our face. And also, we have our school shoes and school socks and everything, so I really live regularly and nothing special. Like the same routine as my friends. But also, at the same time we have to study until 10pm in the school. The class finishes at 4pm but 4pm to 10pm is free time to study in school but the word is just "free", we have to do that for the whole days. So, we were stuck in the classroom with my 40 friends all day all day for three years, so we

really became close, but also, we cried a lot because we didn't want to study, and it was so harsh to us.

This description really shows the strict environment of a girl's high school in Seoul. From our interviewee B's description, we got the feeling that the focus of your school time in such a setting really lays on studying and that the surrounding is put aside, meaning studying is the main priority. It seemed to be a general expectation of high school students to do well in studying and to dedicate themselves fully to it. When being asked if she felt pressured to do well during that period, B told us she would even hear that she has to do and study well from random people, who she does not even know.

I: And how would it be when you would just go out in public, do you also feel some kind of pressure there or how is the situation like?
B: When I said 'Oh, I am third grade or high school then 99% of other tell you 'You really have to do a good job, now you're in an important period', and also, one really funny thing was in the bus, public transportation even a grandma gave me a seat to sit down 'because you're a high school student', so I told her 'No, it's okay, I'm not that tired' and she is a grandmother so I really wanted her to sit but she told me 'no, you're a high school student', and in Korea a high school student is the most vulnerable person.

People care about their high school performance. As the elderly woman in public transport, they know that this is an exhausting period for the students. She cared about how B felt. However, there can also be a more negative side of caring about their high school performance. Expecting the students to always study and be the best, including spending every day in school studying until 10pm, even though they would like to do other things or pursue hobbies and interests.

B: But also, the bad way is they cannot allow us to do any hobby, or like listen to the music. They prohibit them.
I: Did that also happen to you?
B: Yes, because I was really huge fan of Exo[1] at that time and when I was third grade of high school the song "Monster" […] the "Overdose" [album] came out, so I really wanted to go to the concert and wanted to see the music program but like my parents and my teacher cannot allow me to do.
I: So, the teacher also has a say in it?
B: Yes, because I think in first grade of high school, do you know Baekhyun[2]? Baekhyun took a picture kissing with Taeyeon,[3] some paparazzi took that photo. So, my friends were really teasing me because at that time, Baekhyun was my favourite, bias member[4], so I was crying in the classroom and then the teacher called me to his room and he talked to me: 'Seriously, you cannot like him that

much, that will affect you in a really bad way, so you have to stop'. He talked to me for two hours. That was really harsh time for me.

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A: In social interactions, what is expected from you?

B: I think that this is really weak because also in the school we won't have much presentation thing because all our activities are focused on writing tests. And also, we cannot talk to our friends freely, because school they want us to concentrate on our study. […] At that time, people are just saying, oh high school students don't need friends. You don't have to put your time to make friends just do what you have to do [meaning studying].

In these descriptions we could really see the priority that was given to studying in high school. It went as far as prohibiting the student to pursue their own hobbies and interests and trying to convince her that she cannot focus on anything different than studying because this would affect her negatively.

This left us thinking that, if you are prohibited to have interests in any other topic besides school, to spend time with your friends, and you are being told that it is not good for you to do or think about different things, it could be very difficult to find yourself or to figure out what you like and what not, and to make your own opinion and to express it. Therefore, we went on further and asked about the situation and setting in which our interviewees could express their own opinion.

A: [People here in Germany] talk a lot about social issues and have their own opinion, in Korea sometimes we hide…

I: You hide what exactly?

A: When we have some opinion about some issue but that's opposed to many other person's opinion, then almost everyone just hides it because they don't want to be judged by other people. […] Because we always care about people like the whole group. […] If my opinion is opposed to the one of other big group then they will think about me weird (Ahhyeon1st Interview_4:00)

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A: Actually I was not that kind of speak-my-opinion and my voice-person, I didn't do it and just followed the common value and eat what everybody eats and where everyone liked but I tried to change more and more after going to the university because in our adolescence we don't have that much time to make our opinion because we're just studying, we don't think about ourselves that much [in high school]. I started to think about my opinion and know myself a lot after the university.

There are mainly two aspects that we thought we could see in here. Firstly, she said she would hide her opinion because she thinks that, if she expresses her opinion, she would be judged

by others, that they will think negatively about her. So, she cared about her image more than about expressing her own thoughts. Secondly, she explained that because she had to focus on studying during high school, she did not have time to think about herself and their own point of view. For her, this changed when she went to university. This seems to go hand in hand with what was told in earlier interviews about the strictness of girl's high school in Seoul, meaning that our interviewees were expected to neglect their own interests and just focus fully on studying, not pursuing their hobbies or spending time with their friends. Consequently, as visible in this passage of our interviews, this left little space for them to think about themselves, their own view on things and to then form an opinion.
What interviewee A told us gave us a broad idea about the situation of expressing or forming your own opinion in the setting of a girl's high school in Seoul. But this could have just been her individual point of view and what was still missing was some kind of thick description. Therefore, we posed similar questions to interviewee B, trying to find out whether she has the same perception as interviewee A.

> *B: In here, like western culture, for example my flatmates, they don't have any fear to say 'No'. They really can say that but for me it's really difficult and also for A. and another Korean exchange student. First time we went here that was really kind of a shock because we cannot say that, but they say that, not in a bad way, but for us it is really hard to say.*
> *I: Do you remember the situation?*
> *B: Yes. So, I have four flatmates and they're two girls and they are talking about something very…[pause]. One of them told us 'I think Germany and USA have really good relationship', so I replied 'Huh, why? I never thought about that'. And she is talking about like 'dududu, so because of this reason I think they have a really good relationship'. But in my mind, I am like 'I don't think so' because I think German people don't like USA a lot, that is my thought. But I just answered 'Hmmm, that could be'. I was acting like this, but the other friend was going: 'No! What are you talking about, absolutely no!' She was talking about it for a long time. It was in August, so after that I became more comfortable to say no.*
> *I: So that is really different from back home?*
> *B: Yes, I can say no to my really close friends but with just people, it's really hard to express my own opinion because if I say that, if we have different arguments, in South Korea we are not familiar with debating about something because people do not say clearly what they think. So, we care more about others reaction and make other people comfortable than people here.*

Interviewee B gave us a very detailed thick description about a moment that stayed in her mind because it shocked her. Here we can see, that for her it was completely unusual to say her opinion out loud when this means that she opposes something someone else had said before. This seemed to be due to the fact that she tries to be careful not to hurt anyone

or to make anyone feel uncomfortable through opposing their opinion. So, it seems to be common or socially expected to repress your own thoughts for the sake of harmony between you and the people surrounding you.

4.3 Interpretation in terms of our sensitizing concept (Johanna Zoe Hartmann, Steven Tsang Chun Leung)

In our interviews, we got thick descriptions of three different settings/aspects. The perception of "ideal" vs. "normal", the strictness of a girls' high school setting that seems to not support the individual development of the students, and, lastly, the reluctance to express the own opinion because of fear of being judged and not wanting to compromise the harmony among people. But what did that mean for our sensitizing concept of self-representation? Just based on the perception of two interviewees, we cannot make any assumptions about self-representation that could claim to be true for the Korean Culture. Nevertheless, we tried to make some connections between the stories of our interviewees and what this means for our sensitizing concept. These are, however, our own interpretations. We do not want to make any generalisations about the Korean culture.

The first aspect that came up in our interviews, was the differentiation of "ideal" vs. "normal". In our eyes, this seemed to be important as our interviewee tried to change her personality just to amount to something that she considered to be a more desirable character trait than what she thought herself to have. It would be interesting to pursue further what aspects can lead to this thinking.

The second aspect of the strictness of a girl high school we thought could be connected to that, as the students are being told that personal interests are harmful to their own good and that they should just focus on study, in other words, from the stories of our interviews we interpreted that this setting does not support individualism that much. Rather individuality seems to be suppressed to amount to the expectations parents and teachers have of you, as a student. Further research on the setting of girl's high schools in Seoul would be interesting here to see how this might look in other schools or areas.

Lastly, the third aspect seemed to be connected to the cultural sphere, as our interviewees told us stories in which they didn't express their own point of view to others because of two aspects. On the one hand, they did not want to make other people feel uncomfortable, i.e. compromising the harmony within the group, by stating a possibly opposing opinion. This could lead to the thinking that Korean culture is very harmony pursuing and prioritizes the group's harmony overexpressing one self's own opinion. On the other hand, the stories our interviewees told showed that they really cared about what other people think of them and that they feared that they would be judged when saying their opinion or wearing some type of clothes. Here we could assume that appearance seems to be very important in Korean culture and that people are quite judgemental. It would be especially interesting to find out more about these aspects, if they are really "true" for Korean general culture and how the setting of Seoul, being a very big city and the capital of South Korea, affects this.

The story content transited from the general Korean public value and culture to the personal aspect of one's feelings about living in a culture. The "huh" moment came across and the turning point makes us want to go deep into the story and concept. After hearing all these stories, we, in the end, tried to make our own conclusions to locate our core of the outcome of the research on self-esteem. Clearly, due to the small scope of our research, we cannot make universal assumptions regarding this but rather enter the sphere of our personal interpretations.

Self-esteem is a worldwide issue that probably every person can relate to. But based on the culture and educational environment, differences may be possible to distinguish different varieties or degrees for individual persons, i.e. based on their own experiences. Continuously looking for acceptance and feedback can be an outcome of not having enough self-esteem. Adapting to what we regard as "ideal" character traits, not embracing our own personality and caring more about the opinion of others, searching for love from the outside, seems, from our point of view, to be the result of low self-esteem. This in turn then influence our self-representation which is the start of the interview where Korean dressing culture was being mentioned and which was our starting point.

4.4 Mistakes and problems we encountered and the solutions (Steven Tsang Chun Leung)

In the first interview, the previously described communication skills of driving out the contents behind the obvious answer, was not sufficient. Although we asked a very open question at the start to give them space to mark the general topic, the sensitizing concept, and ideas they want to express, the following questions were not used enough to explore different opportunities of the story they were telling. This created a certain direction for interviewees to talk about and go deep and ignore the other outcome. For example, when the dressing culture of Korean is being mentioned, various concepts can be used for discussion such as if this situation would only happen in Seoul or also in the countryside. Or the possibility of asking them whether there are some sub-cultures where people are not following the trend and possibility of pop culture's influence. Therefore, the assumption about personal issues was made too fast and other factors such as urban culture, trending, and fashion culture, etc., were ignored. Instead of building up and spreading the spider web, following the stem of a plant is what we did in the beginning. This is a mistake of going into an interview with a certain direction and what can be interesting to investigate could have been neglected. Therefore, going deep into the stories was difficult at first. However, the good thing is that the interviewees express their opinions freely and that we have given enough space for them to answer. However, balancing on leading and directing the conversation and go with the flow is the skill we had to be more careful about.

The second mistake we have made is that other different possible sensitizing concepts have been ignored in the second interview, as our aim was to do further research on our first sensitizing concept. This is quite dangerous for us as it might make an assumption on what we want them to talk about instead of letting them express themselves and find further

investigation direction. We have decided what the interview topic is and violated our fundamental aims on going with the response they have given. Therefore, after a few seminar sessions, we revised and modified our methods, the open question was being asked again in the beginning part of the following interviews. Based on the story they have given, we led out more specific personal aspects, like the high school system, value, and personal high school experience and expressing opinions. The solution is to let the interviewee express and find interesting things and sensitizing concepts themselves.
The third mistake is that we did not pay enough attention to the body language, as it can also be a factor to investigate. However, this is not a big factor that really affects our research as the casual and trusted atmosphere has been built and enough connection has been linked to our interviewee. But we need to bear in mind that body language is also a part of the interview. Then a few interviews have been conducted and various research methods have been modified.
Lastly, dealing with silence and asking questions more comprehensively are the things we have to learn in the beginning stage of our interviews. The solution on this is that we noted down the responses they have given shortly and made links to come up with new questions.

5. What would we do differently next time, if we had more time and resources? (Steven Tsang Chun Leung)

Since we had a limited time frame, we did not have sufficient time to really improve our qualitative interviewing skills. However, we would like to practice more through interviewing different people from different countries or also South Koreans who are from different regions than Seoul. But based on the core ideas of self-representation and self-esteem, further interviews with the same interviewee is also an interesting option as we could discover more personal stories surrounding self or “You vs. Others" every time, in order to explore the reason behind it with more details. These could entail not only the education system and values but also parenting, social interaction, trending, or even historical background, in order to analyse how it affects oneself. The historical and situational aspects could help to understand more about the general cultural atmosphere and compare it with Germany or, in general, Western societies in order to find out further cultural distinctions or similarities. On the other hand, through asking questions in different directions, we could find out more interesting sensitizing concepts to enhance our research that could either support our interpretations with more aspects and evidences, or lead us to study other interesting details and stories they have given as we aim to gain culture experience.

6. What is the take-away from this exercise and the readings? (Steven Tsang Chun Leung)

The different, not only cultural aspects, but also values or personal experiences between South Korea and Germany is what we wanted to explore and to find out more about. However, the aspects we explored may not only be true for Korean. As self-esteem

affect every one of us in our growing up, this common topic helps us to understand what conditions and social background can cause different outcomes. These common experiences help us to connect with worldwide friends and understand the value behind the person so that we can use empathy to help each other living in a different society. This is what Arjan Verdooren described as “multicollectivity” in his paper “Taking Multiplicity Seriously – New Concepts for intercultural communication” (2013). People are not only part of one specific culture, but rather take up many places within a national culture and thus have many different identities. This can then open up new spaces to find similarities between people of different national backgrounds. In our case, the experiences our interviewees described were very relatable for us as interviewees, which opened up new spaces to connect with each other and to share stories about our experiences.

Moreover, as Johanna will go to South Korea in the coming future, conducting this research helps her to prepare with the social atmosphere of the country and to make friends with local Korean people in a more understanding way. For Steven, since he has a big vision of having more international friends to increase his globalised experience and also considering him as a world citizen, this qualitative research teaches him to have a better communication skills. This also fit for Johanna, to know a person from a different culture background in a better and more comprehensive way. Also, this research gives us both a thoughtful experience on different Asian cultures. Steven found it interesting that even though the dressing culture is important in Hong Kong, Korean people treat the trends even more seriously and also the common ground of both Hong Kong and Korea have a similar educational situation, where people focusing on getting into university and ignore the personal development. Johanna also found out that, compared to Korea, local people seem to be more focus more on their own self instead of others.

All in all, from the exercise, the common value has been found in two different cultures and through comparison, both differences and similarities of these cultures and values have been found to enhance and create connection to worldwide people. But most importantly, we learn a better communication skill which helps us to know a person well.

7. What did this project help you learn about “language, culture and communication”? What role did the language play? – Our conclusions (Steven Tsang Chun Leung, Johanna Zoe Hartmann)

Steven:

I think this project helped me to understand that talking in different ways leads people to have different reactions. The emotion can come along with your message, which can help building trust or even changing a person’s value. As different factors affect how you represent yourself and communicate your value to people or convincing someone, the centre value of communication for me is to let people express their true mindset, which is why this course and project is fun to attend, combing culture with interviewing method to hold a conversation. Therefore, the project is very constructive and useful for connecting with

international people on a neutral way. Qualitative research is teaching me to conduct a qualitive talk with people, so that people can express deeper emotions and give meaning on their story and I can also learn to be a more open-minded person.
For me, language plays the role of medium to express myself. But language itself conduct with a “back-stage” concept where it combines with its own local value, and way of thinking such as organizing, constructing, and way of expressing. Therefore, using language to ask people or tell people about thoughts in a different way, leads to different results of what they are thinking or not thinking and affect your true mind. So that we should learn to use a language in different situations with alternative expressing method and also alternative way to perceive a message. This project is like playing with language and learning how a conversation works in a better way. As I said, language is a medium, with my creative media study background also, I understand that a medium can appear in different forms to transfer thoughts, and so does language. Forming a different setting of language helps to create a new “art form” of conversation. Therefore, I think language is interesting to study further. Maybe if I understand another language besides English, I might also conduct some interviews in other language to see the result and find out the best qualitative research method just as we did on this project, to keep interviewing different people to gain talking experience.

Johanna:
Conducting our own interviews helped me to get more sensible with how to communicate with other people in order to let them share their opinions, their stories and not influence them into a certain direction. Not only are the words spoken important, but rather what is behind the story, the situational, biographical or cultural content, the emotions and the body language. If we truly want to understand what someone is meaning by their words, then we have to take all these factors into consideration.
More importantly, this course made me gain more insights about the role of language in communication. Communicating with people from different countries always seems difficult in the beginning due to having this kind of “language barrier”. At first it may seem difficult to communicate with others and to explain what you want to say in a language that is not your native language. However, what I learned through this research and the seminar, is that speaking different languages does not necessarily have to be considered a barrier. Now, I would rather say that it opens up more ways to learn more about each other’s different cultural backgrounds through words unique for each language. Whether it is the German word “Brotkultur” or the Korean term “중 2 병” which was used by our interviewees to describe a certain period of adolescence – these terms unique for a certain language can show particularities of different cultures, showing what people consider interesting or important. Therefore, I am quite happy that I had the opportunity in this course to talk to people of different origins to learn more about the cultural differences, but often also about cultural similarities. Conducting our own research also helped to learn more deeply about different cultures through stories, that we otherwise probably would not have heard.

References

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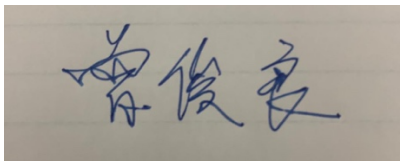
Johanna Zoe Hartmann



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Steven Tsang Chun Leung 曾俊良