

Cultural Frame Switching: A Russian-English Application to the Thematic Apperception Test

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ABSTRACT: The Cultural Frame Switching (CFS) effect postulates that bilinguals switch between two cultural frames as they switch between languages. The purpose of this study was to test CFS in Russian-English bilingual immigrants to the United States. Twenty participants told stories about six Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) images—three in Russian and three in English. The stories were analyzed through a thematic analysis with Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions and a content analysis to record the frequency of high/low scores on these dimensions. Thirty-three out of thirty-six total comparisons showed a difference between scores for Russian stories and English stories. This validated that content values change as language changes, affirming the “frame switching” component of CFS. Out of those thirty-three comparisons, twenty-four corresponded with the theoretical comparison by Hofstede on the large/low scale. The change in content values aligned with the cultural values associated with the language spoken, affirming the “cultural” frame switching of CFS; when speaking Russian, participants highlighted Russian cultural values, and when speaking English, participants highlighted American cultural values. The content analysis affirmed the CFS effect, and the thematic analysis illustrated what the two cultural frames—Russian and American—looked like, specifically that they aligned with Hofstede’s categorizations.

KEYWORDS: Sociology, Sociolinguistics, Cultural Frame Switching, Russian-English Bilinguals, Hofstede’s Six Cultural Dimensions.

■ Introduction

The Cultural Frame Switching (CFS) effect intertwines language and culture. CFS postulates that bilinguals switch between two cultural frames as they switch between languages, citing a correspondence between the language spoken and the cultural values associated with that language. Thus, language and culture constitute a frame; two languages and two cultures, as is the case for bilinguals, constitute two frames.

CFS has been tested through a variety of approaches—internal ones through self-reported questionnaires like the Big Five Inventory (BFI) Test and external ones through observational approaches and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The TAT is a projective psychological assessment tool delivered with the purpose of assessing the inner thoughts and emotional responses of individuals. Participants interpret ambiguous pictures, which are embedded with themes relevant to any individual, by telling stories.

This study will present the first application of the TAT to Russian-English bilinguals, introducing a new population that had not been studied before in TAT research. This approach will reveal whether there is a correspondence between the cultural values emphasized—identified using Doctor of Social Psychology Geert Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions—and the language spoken. Such a correspondence will validate CFS, demonstrating that language and culture are not separate variables, but instead intertwined. This will advance both linguistic and cultural research by revealing that bilinguals do not describe the same themes when speaking two different languages; rather, they display cognitive flexibility, switching

cultural themes as they switch languages. This unveils a dual identity within the same speaker—each characterized by a language and its associated cultural values—as well as the switch between these two identities in speech. These two identities resemble the two frames of CFS.

Literature Review:

To understand CFS, it is imperative to establish the populations in which it has been identified and which approaches have been taken to identify it. Within these approaches, it is necessary to evaluate the modality used to distinguish between the two cultures tested. After understanding this criterion, it is integral to delve into the particulars of this study by exploring the factors that differentiate Russian and American culture from one another.

The Big Five Inventory (BFI) Test is the most widely used means of testing CFS. Notably, Nairán Ramirez-Esparza, a psychology professor at the University of Connecticut, and her colleagues tested CFS through the BFI, which measures five personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness), with Spanish-English bilinguals residing in either the United States or Mexico. When speaking English, the participants scored higher for Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; when speaking Spanish, participants scored higher for Neuroticism.¹ To dispel common assumptions regarding Extraversion, which is often confused with an outgoing attitude, the researchers explained Extraversion’s level of assertiveness, a value emphasized in individualistic cultures like the United States, rather

than emotional expressiveness, a value emphasized in collectivist cultures like Mexico.¹ To corroborate Ramirez-Esparza and her colleagues' findings, Doctor of Linguistics Rouhollah Rezapour and Sahar Zanjirani, from the USOS Institute of Cognitive Science, administered a BFI test to Persian-English bilinguals, reporting that cross-cultural personality differences were consistent with traits in collectivist (Persian) and individualistic (English) cultures.² Previous studies promulgate the usage of the BFI as the primary means of achieving concrete data regarding bilingual personalities. Nevertheless, the BFI is a self-reported questionnaire, requiring self-perception of personality traits, making it a limited demonstration of objective realities.

Researchers have utilized functional approaches to investigate whether the use of two languages, an Eastern one and English, correlated with the collectivist or individualistic culture associated with the country in which that language is spoken. Doctor of Psychology Verónica Benet-Martínez and her colleagues, Sylvia Xiaohua Chen and Jacky C. K. Ng from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, explored whether distinct language usage oriented Chinese-English bilinguals to different cognitive styles and, thus, different perceptual foci. In a study where recruited judges rated personality traits and cultural orientations of Chinese-English bilingual targets with their voices muted, more dialectical thinking was observed when participants responded in Chinese, a country with a collectivist culture, rather than in English, a country with an individualistic culture.³ Their functional approach was not a subjective representation of dialectical thinking in their mind, as seen with self-perception in personality traits like the BFI, but an outside trait detected by outsiders who observed their communicative behavior. Professors of Communication Sciences and Disorders Viorica Marian and Margarita Kaushanskaya found similar results in their analysis of autobiographical memories retrieved by bicultural Russian-English bilinguals. They gathered that when speaking English, bilinguals produced more individualistic narratives; conversely, when speaking Russian, bilinguals produced more collectivist narratives.⁴ Hitherto, personality questionnaires like the BFI and functional approaches have confirmed CFS, in which bilinguals evince cultural values (often individualistic or collectivist) related to the language spoken.

Other researchers took a less common and more holistic approach with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Doctor of Social Psychology Susan Ervin conducted the TAT with French-English bilinguals with the selection of nine TAT images with themes related to hypotheses of French-English cultural differences. Three variables showed significant language effects in the predicted direction: Verbal Aggression to Peers, Withdrawal-Autonomy, and Achievement.⁵ When switching languages, participants' stories switched as well, confirming the effect of CFS, as variations correlated with French and English cultural attitudes, in turn tying language to culture. Clinical Psychology doctorate student Ilenia Perez-Palen administered the TAT to Spanish-English bilinguals, with each half narrating stories in one of the two languages. Words classified in the emotional distress category in English nar-

ratives were significantly higher in frequency than those in Spanish narratives; contrarily, words in the conflict and fear categories in Spanish narratives were significantly higher in frequency than those in English narratives.⁶ She authenticated the connection between language and culture in her examination of bilinguals in the TAT.

This study centers on Russian-English bilinguals to examine the CFS effect on the multitude of Russian immigrants to the United States. To establish a connection between culturally distinct personality traits and language, it is imperative to denote the characteristics of Russian and American cultures. To distinguish between Russian and American culture in more than just the collectivist v. individualist realm, Fred Hoffman from Mercyhurst University applied Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions in an ethnographic study to fourteen individuals who were raised and socialized in the Russian culture, with all but two of them permanently residing in the United States. Hoffman witnessed Russia's high power distance score (the culture's popular acceptance of power associated with status) through a Russian individual's fear of questioning a doctor because of his reputable job title, even when the professional misunderstood her.⁷ This explained the Russian individual's failure to assert herself, even when she was right, solely because of her fear of offending her elder. To continue, in a commonplace McDonald's setting, Hoffman observed restraint in Russian employees who did not smile at patrons, instead keeping a straight, solemn face.⁷ The tendency to hold back emotion is characteristic of Russian culture, directly contrasting the animation associated with American culture. To further examine the Russian cultural tendency to focus on the negative in contrast to the American cultural tendency to focus on the positive, Doctor of Psychology Igor Grossmann, Doctor of Social Psychology Phoebe C. Ellsworth, and Hong Kong University Professor Ying-yi Hong presented positive and negative visual stimuli to Russians and Americans. They found that Russians spent more time looking at unpleasant images, emphasizing darker emotions to look like good Russians; Americans felt that they should say they are happy, look happy, and act happy to show that they are successful members of their culture.⁸ Both groups aimed to uphold their cultural standard, as demonstrated by the varying degrees of reservedness.

There have been numerous applications of Hofstede's dimensions to the Russian and American cultures. Alexander Naumov from Moscow State University and Sheila M. Puffer from Northeastern University tested Hofstede's cultural dimensions in a twenty-nine-item questionnaire to two hundred fifty Russian respondents. While their Russian respondents still scored high for uncertainty avoidance, their mark was a lot less than that of Hofstede and Daniel Bollinger, an International Consultant who carried out a study among 55 executives and directors in training at the Higher Commercial Management School in Moscow.⁹ This was likely due to aberration during the economic stagnation and following market economy transformation that occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union (around the time of Hofstede and Bollinger's studies), causing greater uncertainty and forced decision-making.⁹ As

Bolliger conducted his study in 1994, the unconventional *perestroika* policies, through which Western ideas were let into a previously closed-off Russia, likely impacted his results, making a more current study in present-day Russia necessary to validate a high Russian score for uncertainty avoidance.

Upon analyzing these studies and their findings, the need for an external validation of CFS in Russian-English bilinguals and a contemporary analysis of Russian and American cultural frames remains clear. While Hoffman's ethnographic participant-observation approach was both modern and external, his identification of one-time personal experiences was limited in its ability to generalize to other Russian-English bilinguals. This study will seek a balance of control without constraint; the TAT will not confine participants to a specific story, but stories will be guided by the intentional characteristics that make up the chosen TAT images. Responses to these characteristics will allow for an evaluation of the connection between language and culture.

■ Methods

This study tested CFS in Russian-English bilinguals through the TAT. A thematic analysis was applied to the TAT, in which cultural themes—based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions—were identified and analyzed in a verbatim transcript of participant responses. A content analysis was employed to record the frequency of these themes. The TAT image served as the controlled variable (staying the same for Russian and English iterations), the language served as the independent variable (language changed with participants responding to half of the TAT images in Russian and half in English), and it was tested whether cultural values were the dependent variable (whether they changed as language changed). If cultural values were dependent, CFS was established.

I recruited twenty participants through direct conversations for this study. For cross-cultural research, which characterizes the Russian-American cultures present in this study, Yale School of Public Health professor Ashley K. Hagaman and Director of the Center for Global Health at Arizona State University, Amber Wutich, showed that a sample size of twenty was required to achieve data saturation of metathemes.¹⁰ The participants of this study were all adults who immigrated from former Soviet Union countries to Southern California between 1996 and 2024; fourteen out of twenty immigrated in the 2010s. All participants were coordinated bicultural Russian-English bilinguals, meaning that they had a sufficient 7.9875 self-rated English proficiency average and 9.6875 self-rated Russian proficiency average—experience with both languages and both cultures. In order to meet the ethical requirements of the Institutional Review Board, I collected a signed informed consent document, which included an overview of the procedures of this study and outlined its voluntary nature, allowing participants to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT):

I chose six standard TAT images. The images were split into three pairs. Each pair shared similar characteristics: a central



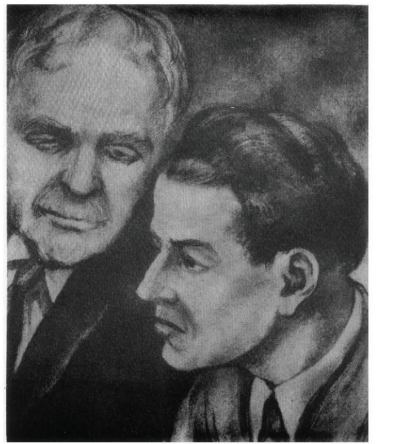

figure (2, 13B), an age difference (7BM, 7GF), and a man and a woman (4, 6BM) (Figure 1).¹¹ These pairs were established instead of having participants recite two stories in two languages to the same image; using the same image includes a likely dependency of the second story on the first, which limits the integrity of the response. The pairs ensured that each response was independent of external factors (such as already thinking about the image beforehand). This allowed for two stories—one in Russian and one in English—as a response to the core theme (autonomy, age, and gender) present in each pair. This enabled a comparison across Russian and American cultural values, as all participants interpreted images that fell within these core themes in both Russian and English.

The participants attended an individual TAT session, which was divided into two parts in correspondence with the two languages. Ten out of the twenty participants began the session in Russian, while the other ten participants began the session in English. The participants were sorted into each language group by random assignment to ensure that the language order was not a variable that impacted the TAT results.

For the first part of the session, the participants were shown three TAT images for one minute per image. The order of the TAT images for the first session was 2, 7BM, and 4. The order of these images corresponded to the order of core themes: autonomy, age, and gender. They were instructed to tell a story about the image: what was happening, what happened in the past, what would happen in the future, and what the characters were thinking and feeling. The language of these instructions corresponded to the language of the first part of the study.

After the first three images, the participants received a five-minute break. Upon returning from the break, the participants were given the same instructions but in the language of the second part of the study. The procedures of the second part of the session were identical to the first to maintain consistency. The participants were shown three new images for the same amount of time per image. The order of the TAT images for the second session was 13B, 7GF, and 6BM. The order of these images corresponded to the same order of core themes in the first session: autonomy, age, and gender.

I maintained a neutral setting to decrease the likelihood of anything other than the TAT images influencing the participants' stories. I spoke the corresponding language of the study solely from the moment the participant appeared; I switched to the other language halfway through the study (after the break) when the language of the study switched. I did not speak to the participant during the break.

Category	Number	Image
Autonomy	2	
Autonomy	13B	
Age	7BM	
Age	7GF	


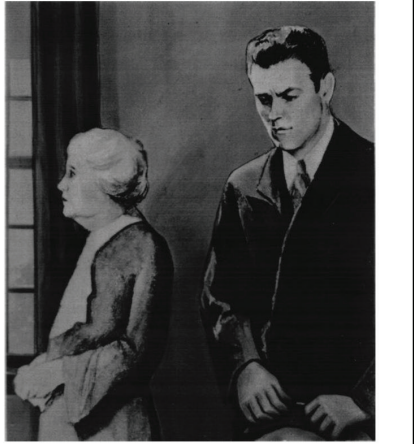
Gender	4	
Gender	6BM	

Figure 1: TAT Images.

Thematic Analysis Using Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions:

The responses of the participants were tape-recorded and analyzed based on a verbatim transcript. I applied a deductive thematic analysis, as described by New Zealand thematic analysis specialist Virginia Braun and Associate Professor in Qualitative and Critical Psychology Victoria Clarke, by using a pre-existing framework to identify themes of interest—those of the Russian and American cultures in this case—and interpret the connection of these themes with language.¹² The preexisting thematic framework was created based on Geert Hofstede's six cultural dimensions: power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), long-term orientation (LTOWVS), and indulgence (IVR) (Figure 2).¹³ Hofstede and his colleagues created these dimensions after administering 117,000 questionnaires regarding the values of people in over sixty countries, including Russia and the United States; these people worked in the local subsidiaries of the multinational corporation International Business Machines (IBM).¹⁴ This framework is widely recognized and extensively used in cross-cultural research in numerous academic disciplines ranging from sociology to international administration, as denoted by marketing experts Dr. Linda M. Orr and William Hauser from the University of Akron.¹⁵ Hofstede's dimensions served as a tool for validating CFS by distinguishing Russian cultural values from American cultural values, which, in turn, would be compared to the language spoken. In addition to validating that these two frames exist, the thematic analysis revealed what the Russian and American

cultural frames looked like, namely, whether they aligned with Hofstede's categorizations or not.

Hofstede Dimension	Definition	Russia	United States
Power Distance (PDI)	Power distance can therefore be defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	93	40
Individualism (IDV)	The individualism versus collectivism index concerns the role (and importance) of the individual as compared to the group.	39	91
Masculinity (MAS)	A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of issues in information systems.	36	62
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Uncertainty avoidance addresses the way individuals in a particular national culture handle uncertainty, and the degree to which uncertainty causes anxiety.	95	46
Long-term Orientation (LTOWVS)	Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards—in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present—in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face,' and fulfilling social obligations.	81	26
Indulgence (IVR)	Indulgence stands for a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Its opposite pole, restraint, reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms.	20	68

Figure 2: Hofstede's Dimensions for Russia and the United States.

Content Analysis:

I scored all 120 TAT transcripts on each of Hofstede's six dimensions in a content analysis. Responses were scored on a high/low scale (zero or one) for each dimension. After scoring the responses individually, I grouped them by language, making six groups (for six TAT images) of ten responses for English and six groups (for six TAT images) of ten responses for Russian. Then, among each group of ten responses, I recorded the frequency of "high" and "low" scores for each of the Hofstede dimensions. After recording the frequency, I divided the number of "high" scores by the total number of scores for each dimension and multiplied by 100 to calculate an average score. This experimental score showed the percentage alignment to a high score on each Hofstede dimension.

Some dimensions were apparent; others were not. The images were not equal in their ability to bring out all of Hofstede's dimensions. To account for this, participants who gave no response relevant to a certain Hofstede dimension were removed from the high/low calculation for that dimension.

It is important to consider the overlap in some attributes of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. For instance, the adaptability in the face of unpredictable circumstances that characterizes a low UAI aligns with a high LTOWVS. However, the theoretical scores for Russia are high on both UAI and LTOWVS, while the theoretical scores for the US are low on both UAI and LTOWVS. Because of this discontinuity, frequency alone is not enough to distinguish between Russian and American culture. Thus, the combination of a content analysis (frequency of the high/low scores for each dimension) and a thematic analysis (cultural patterns supported by direct examples from participants' responses) validated and explained CFS.

The data obtained from the TAT was organized into six tables—one for each TAT image—with the experimental values for Hofstede's six cultural dimensions. For the comparison row, the experimental values for Russian and English on each

dimension were compared to one another. If the comparison—which country scored higher or lower—aligned with the Hofstede comparison between Russia and the United States, a "Yes" was marked. For the "Yes" dimensions, the distinction between Russian and American cultural values aligned with Hofstede's theoretical distinction.

Results and Discussion

Image-by-Image:

Table 1: TAT Image 2 (Autonomy #1). For four out of six dimensions shown in Table 1, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating considerable CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI, IDV, UAI, and LTOWVS—reflect correspondence with Hofstede's Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	57	38	56	86	78	44
English	50	57	44	40	63	38
Comparison	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

When speaking English, out of the two participants who provided a concrete setting for this image, both of the settings were the United States. Three participants described the American dream, namely the desire for the woman to leave the village and start a new life in a big city, a high IDV, and a low UAI. Such a storyline aligns with the individualistic attribute of American culture, through which Americans pursue their passions in spite of societal norms. Moreover, two of the participants noted that the woman was overseeing the workers, a nontraditional role for a female. Women are empowered and possess traditionally male jobs, resulting in a low MAS.

When speaking Russian, out of the three participants who provided a concrete setting for this image, all three of the settings were in Russia. One participant emphasized that the woman rejected the rural setting she grew up in with her book, yearning for mobility. This serves as a breakaway from a previously collectivist society into one growing more individualistic, with more people challenging societal norms, namely, the female becoming educated in this case. To continue, another participant elucidated the guilt experienced by the woman, specifically the shame of her individuality and dreams upon seeing the workers suffer in the heat while she is clean and put together. This demonstrates a struggle between individualistic desires and a collectivist upbringing—on one hand, she wants to follow her passion, but on the other, she struggles to leave behind her roots at the expense of her community. However, most participants focused on the present situation: the crop yields are high, and everyone needs to work. The general collectivist perspective trumps the outliers—the nonconformists in this case.

Table 2: TAT Image 7BM (Age #1). For three out of six dimensions shown in Table 2, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating medium CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI, UAI, and IVR—reflect correspondence with Hofstede’s Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	33	75	89	56	56	63
English	29	75	89	25	57	71
Comparison	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

When speaking English, one of the participants introduced a Soviet and American spy during the Cold War. The American spy tried to get the Soviet spy’s secrets, and the Soviet spy shared them because the peace of the world mattered more to him than winning the ideological competition between the US and the Soviet Union. As the US labels itself as a “safeguard for democracy,” the priority of peace over power outlines an American perspective rather than a Russian one. Furthermore, another participant described the status difference between a teacher and a student. Rather than feeling inferior to the teacher with a higher status than him, the student focused on absorbing what the teacher had to teach him. A second participant characterized the two men as a teacher and a student. This participant described meeting up after a long time to catch up on their lives, showing a positive relationship despite the difference in status. Both examples culminated in a low PDI. Moreover, another participant labeled these men confident. Certain that they would defeat another guy in court tomorrow, they were planning a celebratory bar night. The participant highlighted the men’s assertiveness rather than anxiety regarding the trial, resulting in a low UAI.

When speaking Russian, a participant characterized the two men as scientists after the fall of the USSR. Craving structure, they wondered how to continue living without one. A seventy-year framework had collapsed, and nobody knew what lay ahead. To continue, another participant reintroduced the battle between individualism and collectivism, one critical as Russia transitions away from a collectivist state to an individualistic society in the 21st century. The son wanted to follow his own path, while his father tried to control him. The father wanted the son to continue the family business, while the son aimed to create a new life for himself. Contrarily, another participant showed a remaining collectivist value in Russia: respecting elders. The older man advised the younger man based on his experience, and the younger man listened intently, trusting the older one to guide him. This diverges from the individualistic mindset; the young man does not ignore his elders or go his own way. These participants present the rampant conflict between collectivism, ingrained in the older population, and individualism, often projected by youth.

Table 3: TAT Image 4 (Gender #1). For four out of six dimensions shown in Table 3, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating considerable CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI, IDV, UAI, and IVR—reflect correspondence with Hofstede’s Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	63	56	100	100	25	60
English	22	71	80	67	44	78
Comparison	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

When speaking English, numerous participants emphasized the man’s desire to break free of the woman’s grasp to pursue his own interests—sailing, construction, or acting as present-day Hercules. When speaking Russian, though, numerous participants painted an alternative narrative: the man was about to lash out at a guy who hurt his wife, while his wife was holding him back. In American interactions, the man focused on himself; in Russian interactions, the man focused on protecting his wife. This divergence in interpretations reverts to the contrast between individualism—the individual above all—and collectivism—all above the individual—in the American and Russian cultures.

Table 4: TAT Image 13B (Autonomy #2). For two out of six dimensions shown in Table 4, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating weak CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI and LTOWVS—reflect correspondence with Hofstede’s Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	90	60	80	78	50	30
English	67	60	60	90	30	20
Comparison	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No

When speaking English, participants described the young boy’s individualistic mindset of self-preservation. One participant described his anger at his parents for taking away his chocolate, culminating in his desire to escape his home to get away from his cruel parents. Another participant outlined his concerned face; he was not thinking like a child, and something bothered him more than simple childish annoyances. Both the runaway and the philosopher reflect self-reliance, just to different degrees of maturity.

When speaking Russian, three participants told an identical story: an autobiography. A little boy got a 2 and was afraid to tell his mother about his poor grade. Hiding it was not an option; he needed her signature. His position was futile. He had no way to avoid punishment, and he definitely would not be at his friend’s birthday party tomorrow. The Russian language spurred a Russian childhood memory, one that left an emotional scar.

Table 5: TAT Image 7GF (Age #2). For all six dimensions shown in Table 5, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating strong CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI, IDV, MAS, UAI, LTOWVS, and IVR—reflect correspondence with Hofstede’s Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	50	50	40	60	50	50
English	30	78	80	22	20	80
Comparison	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Regardless of language, most participants described a young mother faced with the choice: her childhood or the baby’s childhood. In English iterations, the young girl would end up choosing herself over her baby. She ignored what her mother or nanny told her, daydreaming about the games she would play with her neighborhood friends instead. In Russian iterations, though, the young girl resisted motherhood, concentrating on her child’s upbringing. Her baby could not be unborn, and it was her duty to be its mother figure. The mother or nanny reaffirmed that the family took precedence. Individualism, again, clashes with collectivism.

Table 6: TAT Image 6BM (Gender #2). For five out of six dimensions shown in Table 6, the experimental comparison between languages and dimension scores aligned with the theoretical comparison between cultures and dimension scores, indicating strong CFS. The aligned dimensions—PDI, IDV, MAS, UAI, and IVR—reflect correspondence with Hofstede’s Russian and American cultural assessments.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Russian	100	10	40	89	60	0
English	30	70	70	60	60	40
Comparison	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Among both languages, participants detailed a relationship between a son and his mother; in fact, all ten Russian iterations were about this relationship. However, when speaking English, two participants introduced a novel perspective: the two individuals did not know each other at all. The participants described them standing in line—to buy food or tickets to a movie theater—each contemplating their separate evening plans. Another participant, when speaking English, disclosed the reason behind the depressing demeanor: the son was to leave his mother for a long time. This presents a struggle behind individualism, as the man is prioritizing himself by moving to a place with opportunity, leaving his loved ones behind. Despite recognizing his mother’s dejection, the man still left her, chasing a better life for himself.

When speaking Russian, the participants emphasized the man’s guilt in the face of his mother. He bore bad news—two participants specified that he would lose his job, and others mentioned death—but he did not know how to tell her. He respected her and did not want to disappoint her. For another participant, the bad news was a breakup. The participant accentuated that the mother’s worry that her son was not going to settle down with his family, a collectivist priority contrary to individualistic ones related to the career path, recounted in English iterations.

Comparative Assessment:

After individual analysis of each of the six TAT images, it is integral to consider them collectively. Across all six TAT images, the strongest experimental comparisons between Russia and the US were PDI (6/6), UAI (5/6), and IDV (4/6), signifying a consistent interpretation of and differentiation between Russian and American culture for those dimensions among participants. Conversely, LTOWVS (3/6) and MAS (2/6) revealed weaker comparisons, revealing the lack of a common rendition and indicating blurred differences that reflected individual rather than collective understandings for those dimensions among participants.

Limitations and Future Directions:

The limited sample size of twenty participants does not account for the CFS in all Russian-English bilinguals. Further research should include participants with a more equal experience with both languages and cultures, considering both years spent in each country and spheres of language usage. In an attempt to equalize this experience, the fact that most of the participants in this study spent a longer portion of their lives in Russia—strong Russian cultural experience—was paired with the fact that they all presently reside in the United States—currently immersed in American culture daily. However, this study also does not fully address the impact of participants’ personal experiences—childhood, Soviet Union, Cold War—in shaping their understanding of Russian and American culture. Their own past may well influence their perspective and, subsequently, the cultural values they highlight in their responses, which may not necessarily reflect current cultural realities.

Additionally, it is important to clarify that the individual experimental values themselves were not compared to Hofstede’s individual theoretical values. Solely the percentage alignment to a high score on Hofstede’s dimension was calculated. This is because the experimental values were calculated on a binary high/low scale in lieu of Hofstede’s 100-point scale. This is due to the constraint of a one-minute TAT response, through which participants did not provide enough information for finer distinctions. Future research can include follow-up questions specific to Hofstede’s dimensions after completion of the TAT responses. The information gathered from these follow-up questions, combined with the TAT responses, would allow scoring on a granular scale. Furthermore, a single coder scored the images on the large/low scale. Future research can employ multiple coders and measure inter-rater reliability to increase validity and consistency across scores.

Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions were used for the thematic and content analyses in this study. When assigning a country score, Hofstede’s dimensions fail to take regional differences into account, instead treating the country as homogenous. Additionally, Hofstede’s dimensions assume that cultural values are constant across contexts and do not vary across different spheres. However, cultural values and behavioral reactions can change depending on the setting, such as acting professionally in a workplace but being more relaxed at home. Thus, future research can tailor the TAT images to different spheres—work,

home, school, social activities—and assess the differences in Russian and English cultural values within those settings.

The setting aspect brings forth a confounding variable: memories associated with the use of a certain language in a certain setting. For instance, if most participants utilize solely Russian at home, future research can include images with a home setting and test whether those images bring out Russian cultural values through a memory-based association independent of the language spoken. Contrarily, for social activities, if most participants use half English and half Russian, future research can test whether images with a social setting bring out a mix of Russian and American cultural values and determine whether those values depend on the language spoken. This mixed setting would be a stronger means of identifying CFS, as it would reduce the confounding impact of a memory-based association and test the dependence of cultural values on language. However, because the TAT images used in this study were not tailored to a certain setting—instead focusing on the characters in the images—the impact of memory-based association could not be made.

■ Conclusion

Out of a total of thirty-six comparisons between Russian and English, a difference between Russian and English stories was observed in thirty-three cases. Within those thirty-three comparisons between Russian and English high/low experimental values, twenty-four corresponded with the theoretical comparison by Hofstede on the high/low country scale. For these twenty-four cases, the change in content values aligned with the cultural values associated with the language spoken; when speaking Russian, participants highlighted Russian cultural values, and when speaking English, participants highlighted American cultural values. The content analysis affirmed the CFS effect, and the thematic analysis illustrated what the two cultural frames—Russian and American—looked like, specifically that they aligned with Hofstede's categorizations.

Understanding the dominant attributes that make up the Russian and American identities is critical to improving communication and interaction with Russian-English bilinguals in the United States, a country in which 2.1 million Russians reside as of 2023.¹⁶ When these bilinguals switch between their two languages, their cultural mindsets and behavioral norms change alongside their spoken words. Such changes purport the notion that identity is dynamic rather than stagnant; it relies on context—spoken language in the case of bilinguals—and is subject to shifts that can be activated by linguistic cues. Comprehending such changes is imperative to mitigating misinterpretations, engaging empathetically, and cultivating meaningful relationships with members of the bilingual community.

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