

Abstract

Traditional communication theories frequently characterize Easterners as preferring indirect communication style, and Westerners as preferring direct communication style. In this study, we asked American and Japanese to generate 3 different types (direct, indirect, very indirect) of conversational expression that they would naturally use to communicate with either a close friend or an acquaintance. We investigated whether (1) Americans (Japanese) generate more direct (indirect) than indirect (direct) expressions; (2) Americans (Japanese) perceive it easier to generate direct (indirect) expressions; and (3) participants in general find it easier to express in a more direct manner when talking to a close friend than to an acquaintance. Results showed that both groups did not differ in generating the 3 types of utterance. They perceived it was easier to generate direct than indirect and very indirect expressions. And it was easier to generate indirect utterances to an acquaintance than to a close friend. Our results seem contradictory to the popular observation that Japanese are more indirect than Americans, but consistent with the past sociolinguistic empirical findings that there is no cross-cultural difference in the communication directness between East and West. This study highlights the importance to explore boundary conditions of why and when individuals in a particular culture would choose to express themselves in a certain manner.