

Considering the native land of witnesses

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IMPACT PARAGRAPH

Relevance

Eyewitness account constitutes a major piece of evidence in criminal prosecutions. Information obtained from witnesses can provide valuable leads to investigators and contributes to criminal resolutions. The findings presented in this thesis provide some insight that may help enhance informational outcomes in cross-cultural contexts. For example, the results presented show the possibility of an investigator's authority to impede the accounts provided by witnesses with a collectivistic cultural background. This finding would help investigators to minimise any perceived power imbalance when interviewing in cross-cultural settings. The findings also provide insight into questioning techniques that investigators could employ to enhance the quality of information elicited in cross-cultural settings. Interviewing techniques devoid of suggestive questioning and that enable witnesses to engage in free recall would help enhance informational outcomes. Thus, the knowledge from this thesis would help investigators in their preparations for interviews in cross-cultural settings.

Determinations of witness credibility form an important part of adjudicating criminal cases. Among the criteria for determining eyewitness credibility is the amount of detail provided (Vrij, 2005). Results presented in the thesis show that elaborate memory reporting might differ across cultures. Without cultural sensitivity to such indicators, statements from credible witnesses or victims may be overlooked because of lack of detail. The findings are also relevant for asylum decisions where the credibility of asylum seekers comes to the fore. As part of the asylum decision process, applicants for asylum have to be interviewed about the veracity of their claims (Van Veldhuizen, Horselenberg, Landström, Granhag, & Van Koppen, 2017). For example, the policy instructions of migration bodies of European countries emphasis level of detail as an important consideration a decision-maker should take into account when assessing the credibility of an asylum seeker (Home Office, 2015; UNHCR, 2013). Given the cultural differences in elaborate memory reporting as shown in this programme of research, individuals genuinely seeking asylum from fear of persecution may be denied asylum if their account

is lacking in detail. Hence, the findings presented in this thesis would be relevant for immigration bodies and asylum decision-makers.

The research is also relevant for the adjudication of international criminal cases. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is mandated by the Roman Statute to investigate and adjudicate serious crimes of international concern. Thus, the mandate of the ICC requires day-to-day contact with individuals from different regions across the world. Although witnesses that appear at the ICC are from non-western cultures, the role of culture in shaping their eyewitness accounts has received little consideration (Chlevickaitė, Holá, & Bijleveld, 2020). The cultural difference between international criminal justice professionals and witnesses can complicate adjudicatory efforts (Chea, 2020). That is why findings from this research are relevant for investigators eliciting accounts of atrocities in international criminal justice settings, where cross-cultural interactions are a common occurrence.

The findings would help in training legal and investigative professionals who elicit memory reports in cross-cultural settings. When training of investigators is not culturally sensitive, it may lead to assumptions about eyewitness accounts based on what is known from research with western samples. The findings would be helpful for curriculum development by incorporating cultural aspects of investigative interviewing. A culturally sensitive curriculum would help in training professionals who would take into account the cultural differences, thus enhancing the effectiveness of investigative professionals.

Target groups

Considering the relevance of the thesis, there are some target groups that would benefit from the results presented. One of such target groups is police investigators. Because society has increasingly become multi-cultural, police investigators are likely to encounter interviewees of a different cultural backgrounds. The cross-cultural context in which such interviews are conducted makes it important that they possess knowledge about the role of culture on eyewitness accounts. The results presented in this programme of research would be useful for such investigators in preparing for such cross-cultural interviews.

Besides individual investigators, police academies and institutions mandated with training investigators would be interested in the thesis. This target group may want to make their curriculum more culturally sensitive but lack evidence-based knowledge on the role of culture in

eyewitness accounts. This thesis provides evidence-based knowledge for this target group that could inform curriculum development and training of police investigators. Making such training modules culturally sensitive would boost the cultural competence of trainees.

Practitioners working in international criminal settings may also be interested in the results presented in the thesis. International criminal courts and tribunals investigate and adjudicate crimes committed in armed conflicts that are of concern to the international community. In such instances, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC conducts a preliminary investigation for a determination whether there is enough evidence to warrant an investigation. To accomplish this, investigators from the ICC visit the country of the crime and conduct interviews with individuals from that cultural context to gather initial evidence. If sufficient evidence is obtained to warrant prosecution and suspects identified, further evidence is gathered. A majority of evidence obtained is the accounts of witnesses and victims. Thus, throughout the evidence gathering, ICC investigators interview witnesses and victims from the cultural context in which the alleged atrocities and war crimes occurred. Knowledge about how the cultural background of such witnesses could impact their eyewitness memory reports would be helpful to such investigators and enhance their efficiency. Therefore, the results of this thesis would be useful for investigators at international criminal courts.

Another group of international criminal court practitioners who would find the results presented in this thesis relevant is judges. It has been documented that one of the key challenges confronting judges at international courts is traversing cultural barriers in judicial fact-finding (Chlevickaitė et al., 2020). Judges at ICCs conduct judicial assessments of the statements provided by witnesses to ascertain credibility. This research provides insight into how culture shapes eyewitness accounts, hence would be of interest to judges working in international criminal settings.

Practitioners working in Asylum seeker contexts is another target group that would also be interested in the research results. Asylum officials conduct interviews with migrants who have different cultural backgrounds than theirs. Officials conduct interviews where they ask migrants questions bothering on their origins and certain landmarks about their place of origin. Insight into how culture shapes reporting from memory would be helpful for asylum officials conducting such

interviews. Therefore, interviewers eliciting memory reports in asylum seeker contexts would find the results presented in this thesis helpful.

Another target group is investigators eliciting human intelligence in counter-terrorism settings. Interactions in such settings are usually situated in a cross-cultural context and investigators not armed with cultural knowledge may not be successful in obtaining relevant information. The sources from whom investigators have to elicit information may be from a different cultural background. Intelligence bodies across the world would find the results in this thesis useful.

Practitioners eliciting memory reports in non-western (collectivistic) cultural contexts would also find the results helpful. That is in view of the fact that what is known about eyewitness memory is based on conclusions from research with western populations. Consequently, investigative interviewing in non-western contexts have adopted approaches used in western contexts to non-western contexts. Thus, investigative interviews in non-western contexts may lack cultural sensitivity to their own cultural context. Hence, findings presented in this programme of research provide some insight into memory reports by witnesses in non-western (collectivistic) cultures that could also benefit practitioners in such contexts.

Activities/ Products

At the commencement of the programme of research, I paid an educational visit to a cross-cultural setting that adjudicates criminal cases. Specifically, I visited the ICC to acquaint myself with work at the court. The trip offered me a first-hand experience of the work of the ICC and offered me the opportunity to ask questions about the work of the court. It provided me insight into the ICC, the type of cases the court handles as well as various units and structure of the court. From this trip, it became clear that the court thrives on the ability to navigate cultural barriers, as the work of the court constantly involves cross-cultural interactions. Thus, to function effectively, the court cannot do without relevant cultural knowledge. Thus, I seek to give a talk where I can present the results from this research to practitioners working in such cross-cultural settings. This includes ICC investigators, police investigators, as well as asylum officers.

Because police working in sub-Saharan Africa would benefit from the results from this research, I would also arrange for a talk at the Ghana Police Academy or investigative interview practitioners in Ghana. I plan to get in touch with a contact person at the academy to facilitate arranging

for that presentation. In 2018, while in Ghana for data collection, I had the opportunity to give a guest lecture at the academy, where I hinted about my research. I hope to get another platform in the academy where I can present findings from this research, emphasising the need for cultural considerations in witness interviews.

I have also actively played a key role in spreading the field of legal psychology in Ghana. For example, in 2019, I was in Ghana together with two of my supervisors, where we delivered public lectures. These public lectures were delivered at the Faculty of Law, University of Ghana; Department of Forensic Science, University of Cape Coast; Department of Psychology, University of Ghana; and the Methodist University College. I had the privilege to speak alongside my supervisors on the role of legal psychology in the criminal justice system. The trip offered an opportunity to spread the field of legal psychology among students and scholars and also provide sensitisation for the inclusion of legal psychology in the academic curriculum. Recently, I have received an invitation from the Department of Forensic Science of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana to speak at a seminar, where I will focus on the role of culture in investigative interviews.

Research Innovation

The research results highlight the need for cultural sensitivity in the investigative interview of witnesses. As discussed at the beginning of the thesis, previous research on eyewitness memory has heavily relied on western samples. Consequently, conclusions about what we know about eyewitness memory reports are based on research with western samples. This research takes an innovative approach by going beyond western populations to examine comparatively, eyewitness memory reports of non-western culture.

Besides its innovativeness in going beyond western culture, the research presented in this dissertation is unique in that it explores within-cultural variations. Previous work on cross-cultural cognition has mostly compared national cultures and not much effort has been made to explore within cultural variations, particularly for an eyewitness paradigm. The findings presented show within-cultural differences between rural and urban collectivistic cultures in their eyewitness memory reports (Chapter 2). This approach highlights that while cultures may differ in their eyewitness memory reports, there is the need to also pay attention to variations within cultures when eliciting memory reports.

The consideration of the cultural setting of the witnessed crime is another novel approach in this thesis. Witnesses interviewed in international criminal settings have usually observed alleged atrocities in their own cultural setting. However, existing work has not explored how the cultural setting can play a role in eyewitness accounts. The results presented in the thesis highlights the need for investigators to consider the cultural setting of the witnessed crime during investigative interviews.

The research presented in the thesis demonstrates the role of culture in shaping eyewitness memory reports. Another innovative approach that was taken to provide further evidence about the role of culture is whether the adaptation of migrants in their new cultural environment shapes their eyewitness accounts (Chapter 3). This unique approach bolstered evidence provided in this thesis on the role of culture in eyewitness accounts. The longer migrants adapted to their new cultural environment, the more they incorporated the reporting norms of the new culture.

Planning and implementation

The experiments presented in the thesis have been published in leading journals in the field. The published papers have been made open-access for researchers and practitioners across the world. I have also presented the research findings at international conferences. These include conferences of the European Association of Psychology, which is a gathering of both researchers and practitioners in the field. I have also participated in virtual conferences and symposiums on investigative interviewing where I have shared results from this research.

The insights gleaned from conducting this research have been shared in a forthcoming edited book in legal psychology targeted for both researchers and practitioners. The chapter is on the investigative interview of witnesses in cross-cultural settings. The chapter highlights the need for investigative interviewers in cross-cultural settings to take cultural considerations into account in the investigative interview of witnesses and other interviewees in cross-cultural settings.

Media attention will be generated for the research ahead of the public defense. The media will also be engaged on the role of culture in the criminal justice system. This will be done in two ways. First, a press release will be sent out the week before the defense as well as an invitation to media houses to attend the defense. Second, there would be an avenue to grant an interview to the media.

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