

# Unexpected Questions in Cross Cultural Deception Detection

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## Why is culture important?

We ‘may as well be guessing’

In cross-cultural interactions, we are no better than chance at determining whether someone is lying to us.

### Culture influences how people interact.

Depending on someone’s cultural background, a person:

- Can perceive a friendly interviewer as weak
- May believe it more acceptable to lie
- Can act aggressive to protect their image or
- May avoid eye contact in order to be polite.

### Culture influences how people speak.

Culture is a shared system of meanings and values passed down through generations. If people place different value on different aspects of an event, then they will talk more about what is important to them, and not what is important to the interviewer. This can appear suspicious.

## Why unexpected questions?

Unexpected questions lead to differences in the words liars use.

Examples of unexpected questions:

- ‘What have you done to prepare for this trip?’ – preparation and planning
- ‘What is the most important part of your travel?’ – travel
- ‘Imagine travelling, what do you see/hear/smell?’ – cognitive interview.

Liars prepare answers to questions they anticipate will be asked in an investigative interview. Asking questions they did not anticipate forces them to lie spontaneously. Spontaneous lies are easier to detect and, therefore, more indicative of deception, than prepared lies, in how people speak:

- Liars use fewer contextual words (e.g., temporal, spatial words)
- Liars rationalise their story more (e.g., words like ‘should’, ‘definitely’).

### However, these findings come from research on Individualist cultures.

People who find these questions unexpected (and subsequently change their language use in response to them) are educated people from western, democratic countries.

## Individualist – Collectivist cultures

Different values lead to different expectations during interviews.

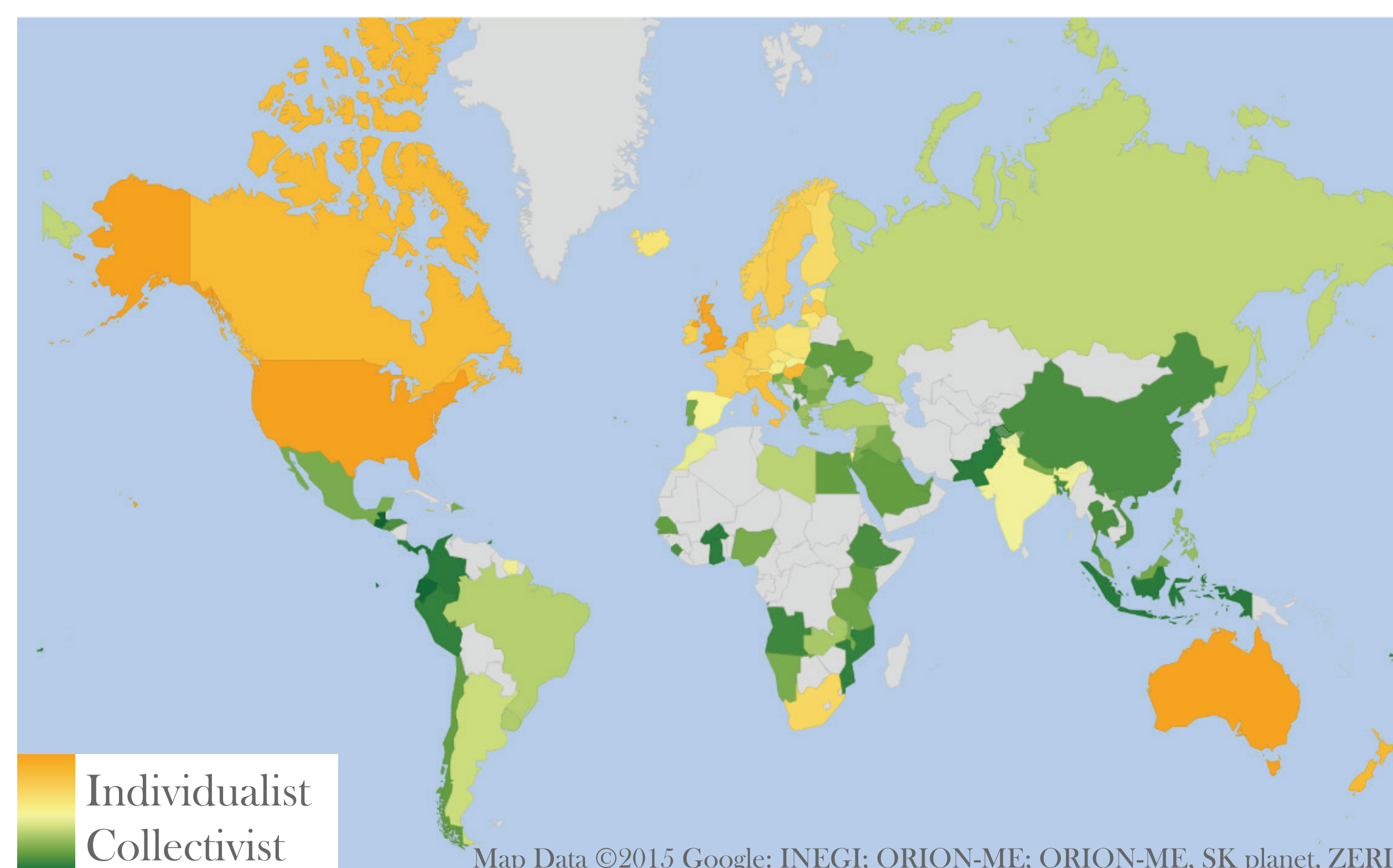
The Individualist – Collectivist dimension is a cultural dimension that scores countries based on how much people value their individuality compared to their belonging to a social group (e.g. family, friends, work group).

We anticipate that, when lying, individualists may expect questions about their own experiences while collectivists may expect questions about their social group. This will influence how they respond to unexpected questions.

### Different expectations lead to different responses during interviews.

People protect what is important to them. This shows in what they omit when they lie. For example, individualists omit talking about themselves when they lie, using fewer ‘I’ and ‘me’ pronouns.

If people value different aspects of an event differently, due to their cultural background, it is reasonable to expect they may also use language differently when they lie depending on their cultural background.



## Culturally specific unexpected questions?

Our pilot study on culture and unexpected questions showed that **both individualists and collectivists do not expect to be asked about people they would leave behind on their travels.**

When considering what questions to ask in an interview, it appears that the topic of the question matters:

- Individualists expected the general questions (‘Describe your intention in as much detail as possible’), and questions about the people involved in their intention
- Collectivists expected questions about the important part of travel and specific parts of their preparation
- Both expected questions about travelling and planning, and the first person they will see at their destination
- Neither expected questions about the people they will leave behind (e.g. ‘How will your trip affect the people you are leaving behind?’)

## Culturally specific language use?

We find that culture has a greater influence on people’s language than whether they are lying or not.

Knowledge of how people’s language use changes when people lie is not enough to detect liars. It is important to consider their cultural background. People’s language is driven by their cultural background to such a degree that whether they are lying or not becomes secondary.

Language	Language Use Difference
Affective Words	No Difference
Pronouns ‘I’ ‘me’	
Pronouns ‘we’	Individualists use more than Collectivists
Social Words	
Negations	Answering questions expected by Collectivists, Collectivists use fewer than Individualists
Cognitive Words	(1) Answering questions expected by all, Collectivists use more than Individualists
	(2) Answering questions unexpected by all, Collectivists use fewer than Individualists
Relativity Words	Answering questions expected by Collectivists, Collectivist Liars use fewer than Collectivist Truth Tellers

## Final thoughts

It is important to continue to explore the differences driven by cultural background.

In order to better protect ourselves, the investigative interview must be as efficient as possible. This line of research aims to offer simple recommendations on how to adapt interviewing questions to maximise the differences between liars and truth tellers depending on the interviewee’s cultural background. The findings so far paint a complex picture, as expected when attempting to disentangle culture.