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A French adaptation of the internal and external encoding style questionnaire and its relationships with impulsivity

Une adaptation française du questionnaire de style d'encodage interne et externe et ses liens avec l'impulsivité

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Abstract

Recent research has revealed the existence of individual differences in how preexisting schemata (versus cues from the outside world) affect encoding processes, which can be reliably assessed with the internal and external encoding style questionnaire (ESQ) [Lewicki, P. Internal and External Encoding Style and Social Motivation. In: J. P. Forgas, K. D. Williams, S. M. Laham, (Eds.), *Social Motivation: Conscious and Unconscious Processes*. Psychology Press, New York (2005). pp. 194–209]. The present study was designed to (1) test the psychometric properties of a French version of the ESQ and (2) explore in-depth its relationship with impulsivity – a trait of central importance in the understanding of emotional psychopathology, and which has been previously related to the internal encoding style. Sixty-three participants were tested using the French versions of the ESQ and the UPPS impulsive behavior scale. The UPPS identifies four distinct facets of impulsivity: urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance, and sensation seeking. The results showed (1) that the French version of the ESQ has good psychometric properties and (2) that consistent with theoretical considerations, internal encoding style is related to two specific out of the four components of impulsivity: high urgency and low perseverance.

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Résumé

Des études récentes ont montré l'existence de différences individuelles dans la façon dont les personnes encodent des informations en se basant sur des schémas préexistants (versus des indices issus de l'environnement). Ces différences individuelles peuvent être mesurées par le biais d'une échelle autoévaluée : le questionnaire de style d'encodage interne et externe [Lewicki, P. Internal and External Encoding Style and Social Motivation. In: J. P. Forgas, K. D. Williams, S. M. Laham, (Eds.), *Social Motivation: Conscious and Unconscious Processes*. Psychology Press, New York (2005). pp. 194–209]. Les objectifs de cette étude sont (1) de valider une version française de l'ESQ et (2) d'analyser les relations entre le style d'encodage et l'impulsivité ; des liens entre un style d'encodage interne et une haute impulsivité ayant déjà été rapporté dans la littérature. Dans ce but, 63 participants ont rempli les versions françaises de l'ESQ et du questionnaire UPPS d'impulsivité. Le questionnaire UPPS mesure quatre facettes distinctes de l'impulsivité, à savoir l'urgence, le manque de préméditation, le manque de persévérance et la recherche de sensation. Les résultats de cette étude indiquent (1) que la version française de l'ESQ a de bonnes propriétés psychométriques et (2) qu'un style d'encodage interne est associé à une haute urgence et à une basse persévérance.

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Keywords: Internal and external encoding; Encoding style; Impulsivity; UPPS; Confirmatory factor analysis

Mots clés : Encodage interne et externe ; Style d'encodage ; Impulsivité ; UPPS ; Analyse factorielle confirmatoire

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1. Introduction

It is well-known since William James formulated his General Law of Perception (James, 1890), that the result of every act of perception is a combination of the objective external data (what “comes through our senses” in James’ words) and the internal (subjective), interpretive schemata (what “comes out of our mind,” as he put it). Recent research has revealed the existence of individual differences in how these preexisting, internal schemata (versus external cues from the outside world) affect encoding processes. These differences relate to how “hasty” (or “internal”, i.e. based on internal encoding categories) versus “conservative” (or “external”, i.e. based on data from external stimuli) the encoding processes are (Lewicki, 2005). This hypothesized encoding style can be interpreted in terms of the validation threshold for instantiation of schemata, which is the relative amount of supportive evidence a perceiver needs to collect before imposing an interpretative category (schema) on a stimulus. When stimuli are ambiguous, encoding algorithms may nonconsciously impose on them preexisting interpretative categories even if the stimuli objectively do not match very well those categories (Lewicki et al., 1989). Research indicates that the more internal the style of encoding, the greater the probability that the environment cues will be interpreted in terms of preexisting (internal) encoding categories, thus providing support for those categories and contributing to their reinforcement through the process of “self-perpetuation” (Lewicki, 2005; Lewicki et al., 1992).

While this style of encoding appears to represent a meaningful individual difference, it would be impractical to diagnose it in an individual by assessing the threshold of his/her instantiation of schemata directly, as it would require using some laboratory experimental methods such as tachistoscopic presentation of stimuli and measurements of stimulus onset asynchrony (SOA).

Recently, a new scale was constructed in order to more easily identify the location of a person on the continuum of encoding style: the encoding style questionnaire (ESQ) (Lewicki, 2005). This questionnaire is based on the assumption that the threshold of instantiation of schemata should determine the probability, and therefore, the frequency of experiencing the commonly observed phenomenon of “split-second illusions” and includes simple questions about the frequency of having such “split-second illusions” experiences in everyday life (e.g., recognizing erroneously an animal running across the road before finding out a moment later that it was a piece of paper moved by the wind). Indeed, because internal encoders are more likely to more “hastily” impose imperfect or even wrong encoding schemata, they should experience split-second illusions more frequently when identifying certain known objects or phenomena.

Lewicki (2005) and his colleagues have conducted a series of studies to investigate the relationship between encoding style as measured using the ESQ and objective cognitive performance measures. Results demonstrate that, as expected, internal encoders are more accurate than external encoders when exposed to tachistoscopic presentations of images of everyday objects or incomplete displays of letters and asked to recognize them,

which is consistent with the notion that they exhibit a lower threshold of instantiation of interpretive schemata in the process of encoding (external encoders more often say that they “cannot see anything”). In another study, internal encoders showed more self-perpetuation of newly acquired encoding algorithms, as predicted from the fact that their threshold of instantiation of schemata is lower, which should facilitate the rate of self-perpetuation (Lewicki, 2005; Lewicki et al., 1989, for examples of procedures used in research on self-perpetuation).

Reporting frequent experience of split-second illusions in ESQ does not appear to be significantly affected by a response set or social pressure factors, as no correlations were found between ESQ and the social desirability scale (Marlow–Crown) and lie scores from various tools, or a standard set of biographical data (socioeconomic status, education, and family structure; some studies showed only a trend indicating that females experience more split-second illusion). No correlations were found with IQ (as measured by Wechsler test and raven progressive matrices). Also, no correlations were found with field dependence (Witkin and Goodenough, 1981), and need for cognitive closure (Webster and Kruglanski, 1994).

In addition, in-depth case studies were conducted to investigate the personality profiles of “extremely internal” versus “extremely external” subjects (as assessed by structured interviews and the NEO-PI-R, Costa and McCrae, 1992). Interestingly, it appeared that internal encoders had higher score in the openness and neuroticism domains. More specifically, internal encoders had higher scores on the “fantasy” and “feelings” subscales of the openness domain and higher scores on the “depression”, “anxiety”, and “impulsiveness” subscales of the neuroticism domain. These case study based data suggest that internal and external encoders have distinctively different cognitive approaches to “reality,” with each style having its strengths and weaknesses (that is not to imply a dichotomy – the encoding style represents a clear continuum). For example, the internal style may facilitate various forms of artistic creativity but at the expense of a risk of potentially losing “touch with reality” and even a proneness to develop dysfunctional encoding dispositions (and psychopathological states). In this respect, the high rating on the impulsiveness subscale of the NEO-PI-R found in extremely internal encoders is of particular interest, as the concept of impulsivity plays a prominent role in the comprehension and diagnosis of various forms of emotional psychopathology (Moeller et al., 2001, for a review).

Impulsivity is generally considered to be a multifaceted construct that consists of a number of interrelated but still different component dimensions (Evenden, 1999). From this perspective, Whiteside and Lynam (2001) have clarified the construct of impulsivity by identifying four separate components associated with impulsive behaviors. These four facets of impulsivity, which are the basis of a scale called the UPPS impulsive behavior scale (Whiteside and Lynam, 2001), are:

- urgency, defined as the tendency to experience strong reactions, frequently under conditions of negative affect;
- premeditation, defined as the tendency to think and reflect on the consequences of an act before engaging in that act;

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