

# Moral Development and Learning English as a Foreign Language

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## Introduction

In her book, *In A Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan expresses the opinion that women are often misrepresented in the theories of moral development. She states that "Against the background of the psychological descriptions of identity and moral development...the women's voices sounded distinct." (Gilligan 1), and according to Kantrowitz, she concludes that the stages represent only male development with the emphasis on the concepts of justice and rights, not female development, which she says, is more concerned with responsibility and caring. Gilligan reviews three studies which reflect the differences of men's and women's thinking about relationships and suggests that current scales of development such as Kohlberg's and Perry's should be modified to take into account more fully women's sense of care and relationships.

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to see how the responses of Japanese women, ages 18-20, in junior college compared with those of the groups studied by Gilligan. A second purpose was to see if there is a relationship between moral development level and English ability. Especially pertinent to this paper were the "rights and responsibility study" and "college student study" reported by Gilligan.

### Method

In her book, Gilligan comments on student responses to the often quoted Heinz dilemma from a series devised by Kohlberg. The dilemma concerns a man whose wife is sick with cancer. He must decide whether or not to steal the drug that will save her. For this study, I used a modified a version of that dilemma. The original was quoted by Mark Tennant in Psychology and Adult Learning. I changed the man's name from Heinz to Kenji and the location from Europe to Japan. At the end of the first semester in September 1989, I gave my first-year composition students a copy of the modified dilemma. I asked them to write a response to it and answer the questions given with the Tennant version: "Should Kenji have done that?" and "Was it right or wrong?" At the end of the first semester of the next year, September 1990, I asked five students who had been in that composition class and now were in one of my second-year classes to again write a response to the same dilemma and questions. Later, I used Gram·mat·ik·Mac, a grammar checking software program, to generate readability statistics comparing the first and second year compositions of these five students.

### Results

The 25 composition students' responses to the first question are shown in the following table:

	Yes	No	Maybe	No Answer
Should Kenji have done that?	5	15	2	3

Two students who said "Yes" gave the additional comments that:

He should keep his wife happy till death.

It is necessary to save his wife.

The students who said "No" justified their answers with comments such as:

He becomes a thief.

To cooperate and help each other may be the only way.

Japan has insurance and a welfare system so he could go to the hospital pharmacy.

To me, these comments suggest an attempt by the respondents to provide ways to maintain the relationships not only between Kenji and his wife but between Kenji and society in general, a keeping of mutual trust.

The 25 composition students responded to the second question as shown by the following table

	Right	Wrong	Natural	No Answer
Was it right or wrong?	1	20	1	3

Additional comments made about this question were more numerous and suggest the emphasis on relationships that would be expected. The comments with the number in brackets (if more than 1) of students who made that or a similar comment are given below.

He should ask the druggist again. [ 5 ]

He should borrow money from friends or bank. [ 4 ]

But, in this case may be right.

His wife will be sorry [I interpret this as meaning sad]. [ 8 ]

He should try to make more money. [ 4 ]

This is worse than the wife's disease.

Ask the doctor for help.

He should consult a welfare person.

He should work more.

The one student who responded that it was "right" later qualified her answer with "possibly."

Responding to only these two questions did not satisfy many of the students though, and 13 of them added that they thought the druggist was also wrong or worse than Kenji.

The comparison of the five students who wrote first and second year responses yielded some interesting results as shown in the following table.

	Question 1		Question 2		Selected Added Comments	
	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
1	No	Yes	Wrong	Not wrong for him	He should try to persuade the druggist to wait.	He did his best to save the relationship
2	No, but	No	Wrong	Wrong	The druggist is more wrong. This should not be allowed.	Druggist and Kenji just as wrong. People should try to persuade...
3	No	No	Wrong	Wrong	It is fate that God decides. Wife will be unhappy.	I'd resign myself or herself to fate. Wife not happy
4	In this case maybe right	No	Wrong, but	I understand his mind, but to steal the drug is wrong.	Druggist most worst. Wife will be sad.	The most wrong person is the druggist, Wife will be sad.
5	No	No	Cannot say he is wrong	To steal is wrong.	Wife will be sad and disappointed.	Wife will feel responsible for his stealing.

### Discussion

As evidence of the different way in which women perceive relationships, Gilligan cites three studies. The study in which responses to the Heinz dilemma are elicited she calls the "rights and responsibilities study." She says, "The shift in imagery that creates the problem in interpreting women's development is elucidated by the moral judgements of two eleven-year-old children, a boy, Jake, and a girl, Amy, who see, in the same dilemma, two very different moral problems" (25). Indeed, as Tennant points out, it is not whether the subjects believe Heinz should have stolen the drug or not, but the type of reasoning used to make the judgments that is important. In this case the reasoning of the subjects is shown by the comments added to their assignment sheets. Certainly, those comments show that the Japanese students are very much concerned with relationships.

Partial explanations of stages 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Kohlberg's six stages of Moral Judgement as defined in Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg are given below.

Level and stage	What is right
Stage 2: Individualism, instrumental purpose, and exchange	Following rules only when it is to someone's immediate interest; acting to meet your own interests and needs and letting others do the same. Right is what's fair, an equal exchange, an agreement.
Stage 3: Mutual Interpersonal expectations, relationships, and interpersonal conformity	Living up to what is expected by people close to you or what people generally expect of people in your role as son, brother, friend, etc. "Being good" is important and means having good motives, showing concern about others. It also means keeping mutual trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude.
Stage 4: Social system and conscience	Fulfilling the actual duties to which you have agreed. Laws are to be upheld except where they conflict with other fixed social duties. Right is also contributing to society, the group or institution.
Stage 5: Social contract or utility and individual rights	Being aware that people hold a variety of values and opinions, that most values and rules are relative to your group. These relative rules should usually be upheld, however, in the interest of impartiality and because they are the social contract. Some nonrelative values and rights like life and liberty, however, must be upheld in any society and regardless of majority opinion.

Note especially that the most repeated comments by the 25 first year composition students clearly relate to the definition for stage 3. "He should ask the druggist again" and "He should try to make more money" would correspond to "Living up to what...people generally expect of people in your role..." and "His wife will be sorry or sad" would correspond to "Living up to what is expected by people close to you..." As well, the statements that the druggist was also wrong or worse than Kenji made by 13 students would correspond to almost the entire definition for stage 3.

A cross-cultural comparison can be made by examining the responses of two American women, Amy, age 11, and Claire, a college student.

Amy says, "Whether or not Heinz loves his wife, he still shouldn't steal or let her die...Heinz should try to save her life, but he should not steal the drug," (Gilligan 28), and, thus, Amy "considers the solution to the dilemma to lie in making the wife's condition more salient to the druggist, or, that failing, in appealing to others who are in a position to help"(Gilligan 29).

Referring to Claire, Gilligan states that she "identifies the same moral problem as...Amy, focusing not on the conflict of right but on the failure of response," (54)and that both Claire and Amy "equate responsibility with the need for response that arises from the recognition that other are counting on you and that you are in a position to help"(54).

In later interviews, says Gilligan, Claire "structures it [Heinz's dilemma] starkly as a contrast between the wife's life and the druggist's greed..."(57) Still later she "replaces the hierarchy of rights with a web of relationships"(57). In other words, "[Claire] articulates an ethic of responsibility that stems from an awareness of interconnection: 'The stranger is still another person belonging to that group, people you are connected to by virtue of being another person' "(57).

In general, the responses of the Japanese junior college students are very similar to those given by the American women rated at stage 3. Though Gilligan says that some of Claire's other responses indicate an "understanding of the law" and an "ability to articulate its function in a systematic way" and so could be placed at stage 4. Likely her responses were made at a time of transition between the two stages.

### **Moral Development related to English Ability**

Comparing the compositions written one year apart, (see Appendix A) I have assigned each a moral development level according to the explanation in Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg, but they do not always fit neatly into a category. However, in this section my purpose was to determine the relationship between the change in moral

development (MD) and English ability. To do this, I compared placement test (PT) scores given at approximately the same time as the writing assignments with grade level (GL) and reading ease (RE) scores obtained with the Gram•mat•tik Mac program. The placement test is a standard in-house test given to all the students at our college each semester to determine their general English ability. Each student's scores are shown below.

	1st Yr	2nd Yr
GL	4	4
RE	81	90
PT	71	86
MD	3	5

Student 1

	1st Yr	2nd Yr
GL	5	4
RE	94	86
PT	49	73
MD	4	4

Student 2

	1st Yr	2nd Yr
GL	4	4
RE	94	87
PT	75	64
MD	3	3

Student 3

	1st Yr	2nd Yr
GL	2	6
RE	100	86
PT	61	89
MD	3	3

Student 4

	1st Yr	2nd Yr
GL	7	5
RE	83	87
PT	69	79
MD	3	3

Student 5

Somewhat surprisingly, except for student 1, I did not find any major change in the responses to the moral dilemma. However, of the four that showed no MD change, student 2's PT score improved dramatically, while student 3's PT score declined, and the PT scores of students 4 and 5 showed a good improvement. As well, the reading ease scores of student 2, 3, and 4 moved from the very easy range to the easy range while student 5's reading ease score started and remained in the easy range. In addition, the grade level ratings of these four students' writing followed four individual patterns that did not suggest any correlation with either the MD or the PT score.

In my opinion, student 1's MD stage changed significantly and her PT score also shows a good increase. However, her GL score stays the same, while the reading ease score moves from easy range into the very easy range.

I had hypothesized that there would be greater change in the MD scores over a one year period and that this would be reflected by a corresponding increase in PT scores and therefore English ability. This study seems to indicate that, instead, there is little or no relationship. However, this population sample is small, and the students were only asked to respond to one dilemma. Another study using a larger population, a longer standardized MD test, and, if possible, another test of English ability such the TOEFL test should be done.

However, one result that was interesting to me was the large number of students who said that the wife would be sad or feel guilty about Kenji's stealing of the drug. I interpret this response to mean that the wife would rather suffer her fate even if it meant death rather than live with the feeling that she had caused her husband to disregard the wishes of the majority and break the law. None of the literature that I read mentioned the American respondents giving such an answer. Therefore, I believe this response may show a cultural bias. Also, it is possible that Japanese respondents would be rated at level 3 later in their development since, in my opinion, much emphasis is placed on doing in what is expected of you in your "role" and on the ideas of "mutual trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude."



## Appendix A

### The text of five students first and second year responses

#### Student 1

First year	Second year
<p>Kenji should not have done that, he should borrow the money from others to buy the drug. If it is impossible, he must persuade the druggist to wait paying money.</p>	<p>I think there was nothing for it but to do so, although it is wrong what he did. He did his best, that is, asking his friends to borrow the money and so on. But the druggist did not say "yes." Besides he charged ten times what the drug had cost him to make. Later Kenji was probably punished for robbery, but he might had understood that very well. He did for his wife. So it was not wrong for him.</p>

#### Student 2

First year	Second year
<p>I sympathize with him and his wife, so I understand his mind which he loves her wife very much and what he did, but it is wrong what he broke into the man's store to "steal" the drug for her self. I think the man who discovered the drug is more wrong than Kenji. I want to say to the man. "What did you make the drug for? It is the person who is bad disease that uses the drug." The affair like this shouldn't be in this world.</p>	<p>I can't understand what the druggist have done that for. It's the drug that is to save men's or/and women's lives. If the drug is too expensive to be bought by the patient, it might have no value of itself. It's very terrible that the charging is ten times. Kenji, however, should not have done that. Although I sympathy with his desperation, to steal is as wrong as the druggist done. People should try to persuade the druggist.</p>

#### Student 3

First year	Second year
<p>I think Kenji should not have stole the drug. If he got it, was his wife thankful for him? No, I don't think so. If he could not afford to buy it he should have worked as hard as possible. I think she would possibly wait, but I can understand his behavior, If a person live or die, I think it is fate that God decide.</p>	<p>[Personal information removed] ...I think also Kenji think so, but he was guilty it was wrong to steal something. He was confused, so he could not know good from bad. However, if he could get it, his wife cured of the cancer, and she know about it, she never be happy. It will be painful for her to live. If I was he, I'll resign myself or herself to fate.</p>

Student 4

First year	Second year
<p>I think, Kenji should not have done that, But, the druggist is most worst. If he gave the drug to Kenji, he didn't steal the drug. The druggist is unkind. He thinks only to make money. He has not such a feeling as to help other people. What Kenji had done is wrong, but, in this case, it may be right. But, when his wife knew what he had done, she will be sad. I knew Kenji loved his wife very much. To have stolen the drug is wrong, but Kenji is very kind. To help people is very difficult.</p>	<p>I think Kenji should not have done such a thing. However desperate he is, to break into other house or store and steal something is not good, but I cannot say that it was right or wrong. If I insist, I think it was wrong, but the most wrong person is a druggist. If he sold the drug for ¥200,000, or allowed Kenji to pay money after, Kenji would not have to break into the man's store and steal the drug. Kenji should have done other thing. For example, finding other druggist in the other town or asking the doctor that the druggist would sell the drug cheaper, and so on. If his wife knows Kenji's behavior, she would be sad. I understand Kenji's mind, but to steal the drug is wrong.</p>

Student 5

First year	Second year
<p>I think Kenji should not have done that, but I can't say he was wrong. I think he would save his wife from a very bad disease because he loved her very much, but even if she was saved with the drug her husband Kenji stole from the shop, she would not only be sad but also be disappeared. So, I think he should have not stolen a drug but managed to make more money and let him sold one. I'm sure his wife must have grieve very much.</p>	<p>I think that Kenji should not have done that. I think that Kenji and what Kenji have done is wrong. Even if a person would want to anything which he cannot get, he should not steal it, To steal is wrong. Besides, even if Kenji's wife feels better and recovers from her illness, how does she feel, if she know that Kenji stole the drug for her? I'm sure that she is not glad to recover from her illness and she continues to has distress that she is responsible for Kenji's stealing. So, Kenji should never have done stealing, I think.</p>

Works Cited

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