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Chapter 8

“Spirituality” and “Religion” – Corpus Analysis of Subjective Definitions in the Questionnaire¹

Stefan Altmeyer & Constantin Klein

Abstract The chapter examines free text entries in the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study of “Spirituality” written in response to the questions: “How would you define the term spirituality?” and “How would you define the term religion?” The aim is to explore subjective understandings by paying attention to the language use of participants, following the assumption that the language use of people writing texts about what they would call “spirituality” or “religion” will provide new insight in subjective and cultural meaning of both terms. Therefore, the chapter opts for a decisive bottom-up perspective on semantics which is realized by a corpus linguistic approach looking for linguistic patterns with a particular focus on key word analysis and semantic classification. In detail, the chapter addresses the following questions: Can we identify linguistic patterns in subjective definitions of “spirituality” and “religion” that differ 1) by cultural-linguistic context, 2) by semantic context, and 3) by personal context (“spiritual”/“religious” self-identifications). Main results related to these questions are: 1) “Spirituality” and “religion” compete in the same semantic field being more similar than expected; the cultural-linguistic difference between the German and the US sample is rather low. 2) Directly compared to “spirituality,” the semantic profile of “religion” is quite reduced to systemic aspects, while “spirituality” attracts a wide range of possible meanings in the field of contrasting poles like “body and soul,” “knowing and feeling,” “spirit and nature,” “connectedness and openness.” 3) Language use differs significantly according to “spiritual”/“religious” self-identification so that a specific set of key words for each group of participants can be identified: words that are both typically chosen and avoided while speaking about “spirituality” or “religion.”

Keywords: Spirituality; Religion; Semantics; Corpus Linguistics

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¹ A comprehensive version and all results of this chapter have been first published in Altmeyer, Klein, Keller, Silver, Hood & Streib, 2015.

The recent years have seen a wide spread of the term “spirituality” and a decreasing number of people describing themselves as “spiritual, not religious” or at least “more spiritual than religious” (Utsch & Klein, 2011). This process has been described as ‘spiritual turn’ (Houtman & Aupers, 2007) or ‘spiritual revolution’ (Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski & Trusting, 2005) by social scientists. Labels like these do not only reflect the surprising popularity in everyday language which the term “spirituality” and speaking of oneself as being “spiritual” have gained during the last decades, especially in the United States of America, but they do also signify important developments in the scientific debates about the study of religious phenomena. There have been quite spirited debates among scholars about whether “spirituality” should complement or even embrace “religion” as scientific concept, and which concept would provide the better theoretical construct for empirical research in the fields of sociology and psychology. Concerning the latter, Streib and Hood (2011) argued against understanding and using the term “spirituality” on the conceptual level as a scientific category replacing “religion,” while at the same time urging that the empirically observable self-description “spiritual” should be taken very seriously by social scientists, because it mirrors an on-going transformational change in language use and subjective semantics in the religious field. Studying this transformation process comprehensively could then not stop with the merely observation that there are people describing themselves as “spiritual,” but must discover the subjective understandings of what “spirituality” – in contrast to “religion” – may express. As Ammerman (2013, p. 258) has put it: What do people mean when they describe themselves as spiritual, religious or neither?

It is the aim of this chapter to shed light on this simple but far-reaching question by carefully paying attention to the language use in the emerging and transforming field of “spirituality.” After a detailed reasoning of our research question on the basis of recent studies on semantics of “spirituality” in contrast to “religion,” we will propose a new form of methodological triangulation by introducing a corpus linguistic approach. Subsequently, we will present the results of our study exploring the language use of people in Germany and the USA who responded to the invitation to write texts about their understanding of “religion” and “spirituality” in our online-questionnaire. Finally, these results will be summarized and discussed with regard to their contributions to the research on “spirituality” and “religion.”

The Language Use of People Defining “Spirituality” and “Religion:” Current State of Research

As reported elsewhere (Keller, Klein, Swahajor-Biesemann, Silver, Hood & Streib, 2013, Chapter 6 and 7, this volume), the question of subjective meaning of “spirit-

uality” in contrast to “religion” has recently received some attention in the field of psychology of religion. Studies in the USA and Europe have focused on people’s self-description as “spiritual” or “religious” (see e.g. Greenwald & Harder 2003; Keller et al., 2013; LaCour, Ausker & Hvidt, 2012; Schlehofer, Omoto & Adelman, 2008). But the picture is far from homogenous since different meanings and connotations vary according to the subjects’ own perspectives, as well as to their cultural background. Thus, we need to be specific about what the concepts “spirituality” or “religion” mean for both individuals and groups in a particular cultural context (Ammerman, 2013, p. 276).

It is difficult to compare the few already existing studies about the semantic fields of “religion” and “spirituality,” because they differ with respect to sample characteristics and the measures they used. For the U.S. context, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) carried out one of the first studies asking 346 persons (32% male; age range: 15-85 years) to identify as religious, spiritual or neither and to give their own definitions of “religiousness” and “spirituality.” While the research participants, who identified as both “religious and spiritual,” highlighted the belief in a higher power in their definitions of “religiousness,” those who described themselves as “spiritual and not religious” had a more narrow notion of “religion” which they perceived as commitment to institutionally based belief systems claiming superiority to other worldviews. Greenwald and Harder (2003) focused on the associations of 147 US Americans (70% female; age range: 17-59 years) who rated 122 adjectives on a 5-point scale from “definitely not spiritual” to “definitely spiritual.” Afterwards, the researchers identified four factors by use of a principal component analysis: (1) Loving Connection to Others, (2) Self-Effacing Altruism, (3) Blissful Transcendence, and (4) Religiosity/Sacredness. Schlehofer et al. (2008) studied responses that 64 older adults (mean age = 78.7 years) formulated in response to open-ended questions about their understanding and their biographical meaning of “spirituality” and “religion.” Among this sample, a stronger overlap between “spirituality” and “religion” turned out.

European studies used similar methods by meanwhile equally divergent samples. Büssing (2006) used a sentence completion format to explore meanings and expressions ascribed to “spirituality” by 38 German professionals in the context of healthcare institutions. In Denmark, La Cour et al. (2012) asked 514 adults (67% female; mean age = 39 years, SD = 15.6; range: 18-78 years) to rate 115 attributes whether they indicated their understanding of “spirituality” or not. On the basis of these data they performed a factor analysis and found six factors describing diverse dimensions of the respondents’ notions of “spirituality:” (1) positive dimensions in human life and well-being; (2) New Age-ideology; (3) an integrated part of established religious life; (4) a vague striving, opposed to religion; (5) selfishness and greediness; (6) ordinary inspiration in human activities. A first cross-cultural analysis of the contextual meaning of “spirituality” and “religion” has been presented by Streib and Keller (2007) using the qualitative data from the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion (Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff & Silver, 2009). They conducted interviews among adults (110 Americans and

136 Germans) and explored the subjective understandings of “spirituality” and “religiosity” by evaluating answers to the question: “Do you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person?” Interviewees who preferred the self-description as “spiritual” understood as a reference to a non-material sphere of existence which is rooted in personal experience and characterized by openness and flexibility.

Keller et.al. (2013) and Chapter 7 in this volume present analyses of the semantics of spirituality, which engages a more systematic cross-cultural comparison using a common standard to assess meanings and connotations in a both semantically sensitive and systematically quantifiable manner. This study used the method of semantic differentials, offering Osgood’s (1962; Snider & Osgood, 1969) 18 opposite pairs of connotative adjectives and a self-constructed list of further 30 contextual adjective pairs that are more closely related to the semantic fields of “religion” and “spirituality.” Research participants in the USA and Germany were asked to indicate their association with “spirituality” and “religion” on a 5-point-scale between opposite adjectives. This procedure allowed the juxtaposition of the semantic associations to “religion” and “spirituality” on the same adjective polarities. By this, cross-cultural comparisons, as well as associations with self-identifications as “highly religious,” “highly spiritual, low religious,” or “neither spiritual nor religious” became possible and revealed stronger differences between self-identifications than between cultural contexts.

Research Questions

With the exception of Keller and colleagues (2013), previous quantitative studies are based on theoretical constructs, especially if they try to enable cross-cultural comparison by looking for a high degree of standardization. Then, the exploration of subjective meanings of “spirituality” and “religion” is methodologically tied up to *a priori* definitions of the concepts in question which control the formulation of items, connotation choices and semantic polarities. Here, we propose to relate and possibly correct such top-down approaches to a decisive bottom-up analysis of peoples’ subjective definitions of “spirituality” and “religion” by applying a corpus linguistic approach. We suggest looking for linguistic patterns in texts that respondents have written in order to define their individual understanding of both terms. Our minimal assumption (Mahlberg, 2005, pp. 31-39) is that the language use of people writing about what they would call “spirituality” or “religion” will provide new insights into the subjective and cultural meaning of these terms.

With respect to the methodological challenges outlined in the previous paragraph, we formulate three research questions: Can we identify linguistic patterns in subjective definitions of “spirituality” and “religion” that differ 1) by *cultural-linguistic context*, 2) by *semantic context*, and 3) by *personal context* (self-identifying as spiritual, religious, both or neither) – and, if successful, to what ex-

tent is it possible to generate hypotheses on subjective meanings of “spirituality” and “religion”?

Methodology

In order to realize the inductive approach of exploring language use, we want to go beyond the established methods in social-empirical research. Corpus linguistics offers a methodology for exploring patterns of language use that can be interpreted not just in terms of an intra-linguistic perspective, but also from extra-linguistic and cross-disciplinary perspectives (for examples see O’Keeffe & McCarthy 2012, pp. 545-645). Because we are interested in developing inductive hypotheses regarding the structure of the empirical language, i.e. regarding the way meaning is created and transported in everyday language use, we opt for a corpus driven approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001).

Corpus Description

The *corpus* for our study is part of the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study on “Spirituality” with participants ($n = 1886$) in the United States and Germany. This study has implemented a comprehensive design combining diverse research instruments such as questionnaires, personal interviews, and a speed reaction task. The survey has included general demographics and several measures which allow detailed profiling of research participants’ self-identifications as spiritual, religious or neither (for more details see: Keller et al., 2013). Additionally, the questionnaires offered a space for free text entries where participants could answer the following two questions: ‘How would you define the term “religion”?’ and ‘How would you define the term “spirituality”?’ Because over one thousand respondents in the US and more than seven hundred in Germany have accepted this invitation, we have a large number of entries, which range from a few words to two or three sentences and sum up to about 40,000 tokens in total for the US and 30,000 for the German sample (see Table 8.1).

Here, we report the corpus linguistic analyses of the bilingual corpus compiled of these free-text entries. The quantitative data collection was closed in early summer 2011. *Participants* for this study are those who filled out the free-text section either on “religion” or “spirituality.” Since not everybody in the sample gave a definition of each term, the sample is somewhat smaller than the entire sample of the study described in Chapter 4. All in all, we have $n = 1,045$ free-text entries in the American sample. Age of the U.S. respondents ranges from 15 to 82 years ($M = 34.7$, $SD = 14.7$); 62.9% of them are female. In the German sample, there are $n = 742$ participants with an age range from 17 to 90 years ($M = 43.5$, $SD = 14.0$)

and 57.5% being female. Mean per capita income for the American sample (\$40,616; $SD = 28,272$) is a bit higher than for the Germans (\$38,400; $SD = 25,524$). Comparison with OECD data (OECD 2011; 2012) revealed that, in our sample, there is a much higher percentage of well-educated respondents from both countries: 50.4% of the American participants have upper secondary, not tertiary education, 49.4% have tertiary education. 42.8% of the German respondents have an upper secondary, not tertiary education and 55.9% have completed tertiary education. Thus, lower-educated people are clearly under-represented.

Table 8.1 Corpus statistics: free-text entries on “spirituality” and “religion” of the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study on “Spirituality” split by spiritual self-identification

Part of corpus		“more religious than spiritual”	“equally religious and spiritual”	“more spiritual than religious”	“neither religious nor spiritual”	Total
Spirituality (US)	N	60	276	545	158	1,039
	Tokens	981	5,361	12,481	2,948	21,771
	Types	353	951	1,624	718	2,211
Spirituality (GER)	N	73	134	364	156	727
	Tokens	1,489	2,798	8,413	2,595	15,295
	Types	652	986	1,936	1,015	3,108
Religion (US)	N	59	279	545	161	1,044
	Tokens	914	4,753	10,618	2,927	19,212
	Types	282	960	1,728	748	2,286
Religion (GER)	N	73	134	363	158	728
	Tokens	1,313	2,768	6,887	2,729	13,697
	Types	537	1,039	2,034	1,091	3,236

Note for Table 8.1: Tokens = number of running words, types = number of different words.

For the analyses reported in this chapter, data were split according to language. For more detailed analyses, we also divided the two samples further according to the respondents’ self-identification of being “religious” or “spiritual.” Responding to a forced-choice item, the participants could choose between the four options “more religious than spiritual,” “equally religious and spiritual,” “more spiritual than religious” and “neither religious nor spiritual.” Additionally, these self-identifications are also used to create four sub-corpora because we assume that characteristic patterns in language use will correspond with the chosen self-identifications.

In line with our research focus on “spirituality,” the biggest subgroup in both countries are the “more spiritual than religious:” every second participant in the US (52.2%) and the German sample (49.1%) belongs to this group which therefore is, compared to the general population, strongly over-represented. In contrast, only few of our participants identified as “more religious than spiritual” which is the option least chosen both in the U.S. (5.9%) and in Germany (10.2%). Among the Americans, self-identifying as “equally religious and spiritual” takes the second-largest position (26.7%) whereas in the German sample those identifying as “neither religious nor spiritual” form the second-largest group (21.6%).

While the distribution of sexes differs among the four subgroups, distributions within both language-subsamples resemble each other. In the “more spiritual than religious” group, almost two-thirds of the participants are female (U.S.: 64.9%; GER: 62.9%). Similarly, the majority of the “religious” groups in both language-subsamples are female. The highest percentage of women can be found in the German “more religious” group (71.1%). While gender is almost equally distributed in the American “neither religious nor spiritual” subgroup (50.9% male), in the German “neither nor” group approximately two thirds of the participants are male (65.6%). The patterns across the subgroups in both countries mirror the well-known observation that women express greater interest in “religious” or “spiritual” issues (Francis, 1997, Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009, Woodhead, 2007). Differences in age, income, and education depending on self-identifications have been explored with one-way ANOVAs and post-hoc tests using Scheffé’s procedure. While there are no significant differences between the groups with respect to age, income or education in the American subsample, among the Germans the “neither religious nor spiritual” group was found to be significantly younger ($F_{(3)} = 6.36$, $p < .001$) and better educated ($F_{(3)} = 4.71$, $p = .003$).

Corpus linguistic analysis

The main focus in this chapter is on linguistic patterns reflecting lexical differences. For the corpus investigation we thus focus on key word analysis to identify these differences and to enable semantic interpretation (Bondi & Scott, 2010; Scott & Tribble, 2006 pp. 55-72; Wynne, 2008, pp. 730-733). Starting from the quantitative statistical procedure, different qualitative analyses and visualizations are carried out to illustrate linguistic characteristics of the relevant findings in their contexts and to compare the different parts of the corpus as defined by self-identification or cultural context. The key word procedure offers a solid way to look for contrasting profiles in language use, especially in regard to typical expressions and words that characterise both content and style of the texts (Baker, 2010, pp. 133-141; Stubbs, 2010, pp. 25-28; Wynne, 2008, p. 733). By using different reference corpora, we formulate our threefold research aims as follows: first, comparing our research corpora to reference corpora of standard German and

American language, we can attend to cultural specifics; second, comparison of the corpus texts on “spirituality” to those on “religion” yield contextual profiles; and third, comparing the different corpora compiled for the groups of participants, we can profile different semantic concepts according to spiritual or religious self-identification.

Before presenting our results, we would like to give some short descriptions of corpus linguistic terms: A *key word* is a typical word within a corpus which is statistically calculated by comparing and rating relative word frequencies in two different corpora, one of which serves as norm (Scott, 2012, p. 178). The degree of typicality is expressed by a measure of significance called *keyness* which is calculated on the basis of a Log-likelihood test (Dunning, 1993). Essentially, this procedure estimates the probability of a word being more frequent than would be expected by chance. The comparative norm is represented by a so-called *reference corpus*. For the visualization of key word findings we use the form of word clouds (Scott, 2012, pp. 100-102) wherein the font size reflects the key word’s statistical estimate of keyness.

Linguistic Patterns in Subjective Definitions of “Spirituality” and “Religion”

Looking for subjective meaning of “spirituality” and “religion”, we set our particular focus on three main context areas: 1) To explore the cultural-linguistic context we address the research question: Are there any major differences in definitions of “spirituality” and “religion” according to language (English/German) or cultural specifics (USA/Germany)? 2) To investigate the semantic context we look for possible conceptual differences within the language use related to “spirituality” on the one hand, and to “religion” on the other. 3) To explore the personal context, we raise the research question: Do subjective definitions of “religion” and “spirituality” differ depending on the participants’ self-identification as “more spiritual than religious,” “more religious than spiritual,” “equally religious and spiritual” or “neither religious nor spiritual”?

The cultural-linguistic context: key words for “spirituality” and “religion” compared to American/German standard language

Are there any significant differences between the definitions of “spirituality” and “religion” which can be traced back to different cultural and linguistic contexts? To answer this first question we look for key words for both terms in both language-samples using standard language as comparison norm. For the American corpora we used the written part of the “American National Corpus” (ANC) as

reference corpus, while we compare the German corpora to the core corpus of the “Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache” (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities). Table 8.2 shows the most significant key words (only nouns, $n \geq 10$, sorted by keyness) in both languages and identifies the intersection between both terms.

Table 8.2 Most significant Key words for “spirituality” and “religion” (US and GER) compared to standard language

Spirituality only		Both		Religion only	
US	GER	US	GER	US	GER
spirit	Geist	belief/s	Gott	set	Dogmen
connection	Meditation	God	Glaube	rules	Regeln
feeling	Esoterik	worship	Leben	rituals	Rituale
self	Suche	being/s	Religionen	group	Glaubensge-
soul	Jenseits	relationship	Menschen	system	meinschaft
reality	Verbunden-	power	Welt	people	Gemeinschaft
connected-	heit	life	Sinn	dogma	Götter
ness	Bewusstsein	faith	Wesen	practice/s	Riten
individual	Universum	existence	Verbindung	doctrine/s	Rückverbin-
meaning	Achtsamkeit	person	Existenz	gods	dung
understand-	Dinge	Christ	Erfahrung	church	Kirche
ding	Realität	Deity	Wissen	community	Religionsge-
awareness	Spirit				meinschaft
prayer					Macht
					Rückbindung

Note for Table 8.1: Each column lists the 12 most significant key words (nouns, $p \leq .000001$) for each category.

The list of key words provides a kind of satellite picture of the linguistic landscape in question. Comparing the key word lists of both languages, surprisingly many similarities can be found. 40 out of 66 key words (60.6%) listed in Table 1 can be read as direct translations from one language into the other. This indicates a quite low level of cultural-linguistic difference. Compared to standard language, the semantic field for “spirituality” and “religion” in Germany and the U.S. seems to be astonishingly similar. Looking at the key word intersection further shows: There are many shared key words showing that “spirituality” and “religion” are located within the same subject area, notwithstanding different weightings in detail.

In order to refine our picture the key words are additionally classified using a general heuristic (Baker, 2010, pp. 133-141; Wynne, 2008, pp. 722-724). To this end, we refer to the theory of communicative action according to Habermas (1984; 1987) and distinguish between five general dimensions of communication: the *subjective* (‘I communicate’), *objective-material* (‘about something’), *inter-subjective* (‘with others’), *contextual* (‘under contextual conditions’), and *aesthetic-formal* (‘by using a specific form’) dimension. In a first step, we have classified all key words ($n \geq 10$, $p \leq .000001$) by either assigning them to one of the five di-

mensions or labelling them as “other.” Second, we computed the cumulative keyness for these classes using a Log-likelihood procedure (compared again to standard language). Finally, we depicted normalized proportions in a vertical-bar chart for each term in both languages to visualize our results (Figure 8.1).

The results, as indicated in Figure 8.1, are quite clear: Attending to concepts, language dealing with “religion” appears to be strongly dominated by the objective-material dimension. All other dimensions are clearly less relevant; none of the other four dimensions seems to be of particular importance. Although “spirituality,” too, is primarily portrayed by content, here the subjective factor appears to be of similar relevance. It is striking that the patterns for the American and the German sample are nearly identical. This finding corroborates the impression that the semantic fields of both terms strongly resemble each other in both cultures. The only exception is that the contextual dimension of “spirituality” is twice as important among the Germans than among the Americans. Nevertheless, in comparison to the objective-material and the subjective dimension, the contextual factor clearly is of minor importance.

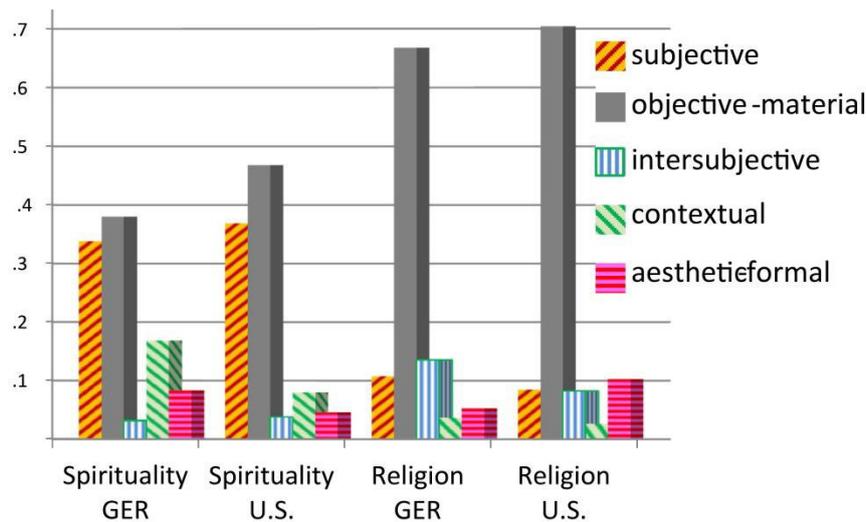


Figure 8.1 Proportions of cumulative Keyness for semantic classes, split by sub-corpora (“spirituality” GER/USA, “religion” GER/USA)

Note for Figure 8.1: Keyness calculated per semantic class, $n \geq 10$, $p < .000001$ (Reference corpus: DWDS core corpus respectively ANC written); visualization of cumulative keyness proportions ($\Sigma = 1.0$).

In sum, our first conclusion is this: Compared to standard language, the concepts of “spirituality” and “religion” seem to be more similar than one might have expected; they appear to compete in the same semantic field. The cultural linguistic difference between the German and the US sample is rather low.

The Semantic Context: Contrasting Profiles of “Spirituality” and “Religion”

When looking on the language use in subject definitions of “spirituality and “religion” “from a birds eye’s perspective” as in the previous section, the overlap of the semantic fields of both concepts was striking. To focus on existing contrasts and attend to differences in more detail, it is possible to adjust the lens more sharply by using another reference for comparison from the nearer semantic context. For this purpose, now we compare the two parts of our corpora by calculating key words for “spirituality” with reference to “religion” and vice versa. With this procedure it is possible to document that, from within the context in question, indeed both concepts differ characteristically.

To present the contrasting profiles for “spirituality” and “religion,” we visualise the key words (selection: nouns) for each term as word clouds. Looking on the clouds for “religion” of the American and German samples (Figures 8.2 and 8.3), a clear association is immediately apparent in both languages: When compared to “spirituality” as reference, “religion” is characterized by ‘rules’ / ‘Regeln.’² In general, “religion” is primarily associated with its systemic aspect as further highly significant key words such as ‘system,’ ‘Church’ / ‘Kirche,’ ‘organization’ / ‘Organisation’ and ‘regulations’ indicate. This finding suits well to a second observation that “religion” also appears to be strongly related to doctrinal aspects, e. g. ‘belief’ / ‘Glaube,’ ‘traditions’ / ‘Traditionen,’ or ‘doctrines’ / ‘Glaubenssätze.’

In order to realize a more differentiated analysis sensitive for the specific semantic sphere of “religion”/“spirituality,” the key words have been classified by means of a heuristics employing Smart’s (1998) dimensional model of religion. From a standpoint theoretically well-grounded in philosophy of religion, Smart distinguishes between seven dimensions of “religion:” *Ritual, narrative and mythic, experiential and emotional, social and institutional, ethical and legal, doctrinal and philosophical, and material* dimension of “religion.”

² We mark direct quotations of key words by using inverted commas. If the same key word occurs in both languages, we use a slash to reflect the translations.



Figure 8.2 Key word cloud (nouns) “religion” vs. “spirituality” (US sample, $n \geq 5$, $p \leq .0025$)

Both the American and the German corpora are dominated by the dogmatic-philosophical and social-institutional dimensions. These two dimensions are represented by 9, respectively 11 key words (out of 44) in the U.S. and by 14, respectively 11 key words (out of 36) in the German corpus. Thus, together they comprise 61% (GER) and 50% (USA) of the whole keyness. It is striking that the key words assigned to these two dimensions are largely identical in both languages (e.g. ‘beliefs,’ ‘traditions,’ ‘doctrines,’ ‘Church,’ ‘community,’ etc.). There is only one important exception: While ‘Gott’ (God) is key word for the German definitions, meaning that, for the German participants, ‘God’ belongs to the semantics of “religion,” but not of “spirituality,” ‘God’ does not occur among the key words for “religion” among the Americans (although the plural ‘Gods’ / ‘Götter’ appears as key word for both corpora).

Among Smart’s other dimensions, the ethical and legal dimension (rules and commandments for human behaviour) is present both in the American and the German corpora. It is indicated by highly significant key words such as ‘rules’ / ‘Regeln’ and occurs even more diversified in the American corpus, represented for instance by words such as ‘system,’ ‘regulations,’ ‘guidelines,’ ‘order,’ etc. Smart’s ritual dimension is also clearly addressed (‘rituals,’ ‘worship,’ etc.) with a high degree of congruence in both countries. Furthermore, the experiential-emotional dimension is of particular interest since it sheds some light on the differences how “religion” is evaluated in contrast to “spirituality.” Both among the Americans and among the Germans ‘fear’ / ‘Angst’ appears as a significant key word. In the German corpus, we find even more expressions of negativity like ‘Intoleranz’ (intolerance) and ‘Dogmatismus’ (dogmatism), but also positive psycho-

social functions like ‘Halt’ (footing) and ‘Rückbindung’ (bonding). Similar negative evaluations can also be observed among the Americans, e. g. in adjectives such as ‘rigid,’ ‘ritualistic,’ or ‘man-made.’

The remaining dimensions are only marginally or even not present. The narrative dimensions is only addressed by the Americans (‘texts,’ ‘stories’) while, in both corpora, the material dimension – which would encompass religious objects, places, buildings etc. – is not present at all.



Figure 8.3 Key word cloud (nouns) “religion” vs. “spirituality” (German sample, $n \geq 5$, $p \leq .0025$)

The key word clouds for “spirituality” in Figures 8.4 and 8.5 illustrate the contrasting context profiles and reveal obvious differences emerging from direct comparison to the “religion” corpora. The doctrinal, institutional and legal aspects which have dominated the semantic field of “religion” are completely missing. Instead, there is a variety of shimmering anthropological polarities like ‘spirit’ / ‘Geist’ and matter / ‘Materie,’ ‘body’ / ‘Körper’ and ‘soul’ / ‘Seele,’ ‘knowing’ and ‘feeling,’ or ‘connectedness’ / ‘Verbundenheit’ and openness / ‘Offenheit.’ Thus, as first impression, there seems to be more variety in the definitions of “spirituality” than of “religion.”



Figure 8.4 Key word cloud (nouns) “spirituality” vs. “religion” (US sample, $n \geq 5$, $p \leq .0025$)



Figure 8.5 Key word cloud (nouns) “spirituality” vs. “religion” (German sample, $n \geq 5$, $p \leq .0025$)

In order to structure this variegated picture, we looked for relations between key words (Scott, 2012, pp. 199-201). We computed co-occurrences of key words within a collocational span of eight words and estimated the relational strength by means of Log-likelihood test. Following this algorithm ($\text{Log}L \geq 30$), we were able to detect three major and one smaller group of key words for the American corpus which can be semantically interpreted as four different conceptions of “spirituality:”

- Conception “spirit and soul:” The English key words ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ co-occur most often significantly ($LogL = 91.32$) and are furthermore linked with the key words ‘mind’ and ‘relationship.’ This grouping of words indicates that, within in our American corpus, there exists a first conception of “spirituality” focussing on mental processes in the transcendental realm highlighting the inner dimension of being “spiritual.”
- Conception “connection:” There is a second network of key words in the American corpus which is built around the term ‘connection.’ It comprises nearly ten mutually related key words (e.g. ‘feeling’ and ‘sense,’ ‘self,’ ‘world,’ ‘nature,’ and ‘things’), thus linking the inner dimension of “spirituality” with an external reality which is primarily described as ‘world’ or ‘nature.’ Therefore, this conception of “Spirituality” expresses the subjective feeling of being connected with something greater than oneself, described mostly in immanent terms.
- Conception “meaning and life:” The third group of key words in the American corpus includes terms such as ‘life,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘understanding.’ Thus, it stresses the significance of “spirituality” as a term which is not solely used in a descriptive way, but also as expression of a personal life orientation.
- Conception “practice:” At least, there is a small group of key words among the Americans which consists only of two, but strongly related key words ($LogL = 118.43$): ‘Meditation’ and ‘prayer.’ This conception of “spirituality” clearly expresses the practical, ritual dimension of being “spiritual.”

For the German corpus, there are only three groups of key words which are significantly related to each other ($LogL \geq 20$). They, too, can be interpreted as three major conceptions of “spirituality” which are described in the following.

- Conception “body and soul:” The German key words ‘Körper’ (body) and ‘Seele’ (soul) are most strongly linked with each other ($LogL = 77.25$); furthermore, they share the relationship with the key words ‘Einklang’ (harmony) and ‘spirit’ (Geist). This first network of key words represents a conception of “spirituality” as a holistic way of life integrating the physical and mental dimensions of human life.
- Conception “Life:” The key word ‘Leben’ (life) is related to seven other key words building a semantic network, comprising ‘Liebe’ (love), ‘Kraft’ (power), ‘Bewusstsein’ (awareness), ‘Realität’ (reality), and ‘Natur’ (nature). This list of key words can be understood as indicators of a conception which describes “spirituality” as a specific footing of life. “Spirituality,” in this sense, is connected to elementary values of life.
- Conception “Things:” The third semantic network in the German corpus is grouped around the key word ‘Dinge’ (things), comprising ‘Suche’ (search), ‘Beschäftigung’ (addressing), ‘Wahrnehmung’ (perception), ‘Erde’ (earth), and ‘Jenseits’ (afterlife) . Within this context, “spirituality” seems to be connected to a specific area or to phenomena of life which need particular attention or ways of addressing.

Taking the findings detailed above together, we can conclude that the terms “spirituality” and “religion” compete in the same semantic field, but that they are profiled contrastingly. While “religion” is primarily perceived in its dogmatic, social and legal aspects and associated with rather negative evaluations such as being rigid, ritualistic, or human-made, “spirituality” appears to be more embedded in positively connoted subjective, experiential aspects. The semantics of dogma, rules, and institution disappear for the benefit of a variegated picture of different conceptions of “spirituality.” Among our respondents, “spirituality” may stand for (1) a holistic lifestyle, (2) the addressing of specific phenomena or specific practices, (3) mental processes typically labelled with “spirit and soul;” additionally, the term refers to (4) a meaningful life orientation and (5) the feeling of living in connection with something or someone. Again, the strong similarities of the semantics of both terms in the USA and Germany are striking. Thus, we find our observation of only low cultural-linguistic differences confirmed.

The Personal Context: Language Use and “Spiritual/Religious” Self-identification

Because we want to explore additionally whether definitions of “religion” and “spirituality” differ depending on “religious” or “spiritual” self-identification, we use the self-identifications of the participants as “more religious than spiritual,” “more spiritual than religious,” “equally religious and spiritual,” and “neither religious nor spiritual” to split up the corpus material into sub-corpora according to their membership in one of the four groups. We performed a key word analysis for each group and use the definitions of the other groups as reference corpus. Additionally, we performed reversed procedures in order to look for words which have characteristically been avoided. For the following description we focus mostly on nouns (thereby, key words frequencies could be quite low, because group sizes vary considerably; cf. Table 8.1).

In the group of the “more religious than spiritual,” “spirituality” and “religion” seem to be very close to each other and associated with religious core vocabulary such as ‘God’ and ‘Bible,’ and, additionally, with ‘Jesus’ in the German corpus (see Table 8.3). Especially in the German texts, the key words mirror two main alternatives: Either “spirituality” is integrated into the concept of “religion,” e.g. ‘der Bibel entsprechend, sein Leben ausrichten’ (to live according to the Bible), or it is constructed as the very opposite: as ‘Esoterik’ (esotericism). Corresponding to this, “more religious than spiritual” persons from Germany avoid thinking of “spirituality” in naturalistic and universalistic terms. The second observation can also be found in the US corpus. There are “more religious people” tending to separate “spirituality” and “religion,” because “spirituality” means ‘believing in spirits’ and not attending ‘Church.’

Table 8.3 Key words (nouns) for the “more religious than spiritual” group compared to residual texts ($n \geq 3, p < .05$)

	Religion		Spirituality	
	US	GER	US	GER
Positive Key Words	God power belief relationship conduct bible right	Leben Gott Glaube Jesus Hilfe Gottes Sinne	spirits church	Bibel Gott Esoterik
Negative Key Words	world	n.s.	beliefs living	Natur Menschen Verbundenheit Existenz Körper Bewusstsein

The group of the “equally religious and spiritual” is more profiled in both countries (see Table 8.4). In the US sample, we see many similarities between “religion” and “spirituality.” Both concepts are strongly connected to ‘God’ and ‘faith.’ Nevertheless, “religion” is more located in institutional settings (‘church,’ ‘practices,’ and, as verb: ‘organize’) and “spirituality” fits more to thematic aspects of Christian religiosity (‘father,’ ‘son,’ ‘Jesus’). In the German sample, the difference line can be located between “religion” as a practice (‘Praxis’ (practice), ‘Lebensweise’ (way of living)) and “spirituality” as a dimension of awareness (key verb: ‘spüren’ (feel)). One may conclude that people who describe themselves as “equally religious and spiritual” are able to distinguish between the concepts. They use them to speak about different aspects of life. Comparing the languages, we see a strong presence of Christian core vocabulary among the American “equally religious and spiritual,” while it is less visible among the German “equally religious and spiritual.” In Germany, rather the “more religious than spiritual” seem to make use of core Christian terms. This may reflect the fact that the more traditional and perhaps conservative Christians assemble in the American “equally religious and spiritual” group (Streib et al., 2009).

Within the group of the “more spiritual than religious,” we find the concepts most differentiated (it is, of course, the largest group in our sample): Overall, “spirituality” seems to work as a distinguishing label to establish a border to the “religious” territory (see Table 8.5). “Religion” is associated with negative and restrictive features such as ‘Unterdrückung’ (oppression), ‘set of rules’ / ‘Regeln,’ ‘laws,’ and ‘dogma’ / ‘Dogmen’ while positive factors are avoided (see negative key words such as ‘power,’ ‘need,’ ‘Hilfe’ (help), or ‘Beziehung’ (relationship)). Looking on adjectives, this observation can be confirmed: “religion” is ‘man-made’ and ‘rigid.’ On the other hand, we find very positive connotations in the definitions of “spirituality” such as ‘desire,’ ‘heaven,’ ‘happiness’ / ‘Freude,’

‘love’ / ‘Liebe,’ ‘help,’ ‘morality’ or ‘Quelle’ (resource), ‘Einheit’ (unity), and ‘Wahrheit’ (truth). Looking on negative key words, we see that “more spiritual than religious” persons write mostly outside traditional religious language, regardless of which of both concepts they are considering: They don’t speak about ‘God’ or ‘Christ,’ ‘worship’ or ‘faith,’ and ‘believing.’

Table 8.4 Key words (nouns) for the “equally religious and spiritual” group compared to residual texts ($n \geq 4, p < .05$)

	Religion		Spirituality	
	US	GER	US	GER
Positive Key Words	God study faith act church being beliefs practices worshipping teachings believing	Lebensweise Liebe Christus Praxis Jesus Glaubens	God faith spirit worship relationship life side father son Jesus thoughts	Spiritus Spirit Dimension Alltag Verbindung Gottes
Negative Key Words	rules fear conduct use systems behavior stories idea salvation term ethics control groups	Götter Tradition Wahrheit Wissen Vorstellungen Vertrauen Organisation	control state things individual universe pursuit existence people mankind thinking sort morals time principles God’s wonder affect interest world humans	Universum Teil Beschäftigung Form Erkenntnis Tod Einheit Kräfte

Table 8.5 Key words (nouns) for the “more spiritual than religious” group compared to residual texts ($n \geq 5, p < .05$)

	Religion		Spirituality		
	US	GER	US	GER	
Positive Key Words	group	Regeln	desire	Liebe	
	rules	Konstrukt	morals	Quelle	
	self	Unterdrückung	principles	Freude	
	lead	Dogmen	laws	Sein	
	attempt	Lehren	flow	Einheit	
	methods	Vorstellung	heaven	Wahrheit	
	act	Glaubenssystem	experience	Gedanken	
	expectations		view	Wissen	
	business		respect	Teil	
	excuse		happiness	Wissenschaft	
	laws		help	Bewusstsein	
	dogma		ethics	Erde	
	human		love	Suche	
	stories		earth	Verantwortung	
			universe	Mitgefühl	
			pursuit		
			morality		
			humans		
	Negative Key Words	God	Christus	term	Esoterik
		life	Jesus	powers	Energien
being		Leben	God's	Glauben	
believe		Glaube	belief	Kontakt	
day		Beziehung	worship	Glaube	
study		Hilfe	gods	Bezug	
power		Phänomene	spirits	Geistes	
faith		Fragen	idea		
beings		Gott	thoughts		
worshipping			sense		
beliefs			force		
help			faith		
believing					
need					
act					

If people choose to describe themselves as “neither religious nor spiritual,” they simultaneously show a strongly negatively connoted linguistic concept of both “religion” and “spirituality” (see Table 8.6). We conclude that the self-concept is mirrored in the language chosen to define the terms. One can see this negative view in key words like ‘mythology’ or ‘fear’ as connected to “religion,” and ‘nonsense’ linked to “spirituality” in the US corpus, and ‘Erfindung’ (fiction), ‘Märchen’ (fairy tale), or ‘Aberglauben’ (superstition) as key words for “religion,” and ‘Blah,’ or ‘Esoterik’ (esotericism) for “spirituality” in the German corpus. Corresponding to these findings we can identify many positive values as negative key words meaning that they are avoided while writing about “religion” and “spir-

ity.” Additionally, the “neither nor” group does not use any religious core vocabulary: in both languages ‘Bible,’ ‘Jesus,’ ‘God’ are negatively key. Instead, they tend to use terms that are more rooted in the philosophy of religion (including religious criticism): ‘gods,’ ‘deities,’ ‘powers,’ ‘force,’ etc.

Table 8.6 Key words (nouns) for the “neither religious nor spiritual” group compared to residual texts ($n \geq 3$, $p < .05$, but * $n \geq 4$)

	Religion		Spirituality		
	US	GER	US	GER*	
Positive Key Words	world	Götter	belief	Glaube	
	life	Einfluss	nonsense	Blah	
	mythology	Erfindung	term	Esoterik	
	belief	Märchen	force	Glauben	
	group	Aberglauben	gods	Bedeutung	
	deities	Verhaltensregeln	existence	Begriff	
	beings	Weltvorstellung	deity	Mächte	
	meaning	Wesen	body	Übernatürliches	
	leader	Phänomene	things	Versuch	
	cause	Antworten	nature	Sinne	
	person's	Mittel	events	Kräfte	
	need		environment	Vorstellung	
	powers		idea	Religionen	
	fear				
	action				
	leaders				
	morality				
	Negative Key Words	church	Gemeinschaft	God	Gott
		structure	Tun	spirit	Suche
religions		Liebe	Jesus	Liebe	
bible		Mensch	Christ	Wissen	
God		Rahmen	relationship	Erde	
laws		Bibel	love	Gottes	
relationship		Gott	life	Vertrauen	
going		Gottheit	awareness	Offenheit	
attempt		Vertrauen	being	Inneren	
Jesus		Rückverbindung	bible	Gedanken	
denomination		Rückbindung	need	Sein	
			creator	Spirit	
			seeking	Wahrnehmen	
			desire	Achtsamkeit	
			knowing		

In sum, the linguistic portraits of the groups of participants presented above show: Language use differs significantly according to “spiritual” or “religious” self-identification so that we were able to identify specific sets of key words for each group of participants: words that are both typically chosen and typically avoided while speaking about “spirituality” or “religion.” Comparing the concepts, we may conclude: People who describe themselves as “neither religious nor spiritual”

show only limited capacity or interest to distinguish between “religion” and “spirituality” while these features are more developed in the other groups. Here the question is rather how the difference line is constructed: either as opposition between competing concepts (especially among the “more spiritual than religious” group, but in parts also among the “more religious than spiritual” group) or as a polarity of complementary realities (among the “equally religious and spiritual” group).

Discussion

It was the aim of this chapter to explore subjective understandings of “spirituality” and “religion” by paying attention to the language use of participants, following the assumption that the language use of people writing texts about their personal view of “spirituality” and “religion” will provide new knowledge about subjective and cultural meaning of both terms. Starting with the last paragraph, our findings can be summarized as follows: As the findings about different language use within the groups of the “more religious than spiritual,” “more spiritual than religious,” “equally religious and spiritual,” and “neither religious nor spiritual” respondents show, subjective understandings of “spirituality” and “religion” depend strongly on how someone speaks about oneself: Whether people describe themselves as “religious,” “spiritual,” or “neither religious nor spiritual” predetermines their preferred and avoided language when defining both terms.

Differences between “spirituality” and “religion” are most significant among those who identify themselves as “more spiritual than religious,” in both the American and German sample. Here, “spirituality” and “religion” are most likely to be used as opposites, whereby the difference line runs between experiential “spirituality” (positive connotation with emphasis on internal authority), on the one hand, and organizational “religion” (negative connotation with emphasis on external authority), on the other hand, (cf. Heelas et al., 2005; Keller et al., 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

In contrast, definitions of participants who identified as “neither religious nor spiritual” show very little differences, but share a pronounced critical view of both concepts. Unlike to the evaluation of our participants’ semantic differentials (see Chapter 7), also on the basis of a comparison between the corpora of the American and German free text entries there is no clear difference in language use visible. However, here as there, both concepts are perceived as irrational.

This negative evaluation disappears among the group of the “equally spiritual and religious.” These people show the capacity to distinguish between both concepts and to set their own accents (cf. Ammerman, 2013). According to our results, “equally spiritual and religious” Germans are more likely to state a difference between both terms: While “religion” appears to be linked more directly to Christianity, “spirituality” tends to be more independent from the Christian sphere.

Among our American participants, however, both concepts seem to be positioned closer to each other. This finding mirrors a finding which Keller et al. (2013) already observed when examining the same sample, namely that Germans seem to be less likely to use the terms “religion” and “spirituality” synonymously, whereas this seems to be the most common notion within the USA.

For “more religious than spiritual” participants, the two concepts are closely related in both languages, too. Nevertheless, there seem to be two alternatives which can be distinguished: Either “spirituality” is understood as integrated part of established religious life, or it represents something strange one is sceptical about, like esotericism.

Summing up, our linguistic analyses corroborate several findings reported by previous studies. Additionally, new findings are revealed which complete the picture in a fruitful way: First and foremost, the analysis of subjective language use shows that the concepts “spirituality” and “religion” are currently defined in a very similar way in both languages and cultures – much more similar, anyway, than might be expected with respect to the very different religious landscapes in the USA and Germany, and from the partially divergent history of concepts. Furthermore, it is possible to identify particular key words which characterize the language use of the different groups, namely those which they typically employ when talking about “religion” and “spirituality,” and those which they typically avoid. The clearest findings are:

- *Religious or Christian core vocabulary* (God, Christ, Bible etc.) is positively employed by “religious” people (“more religious than spiritual” and “equally religious and spiritual”) and avoided by the other groups. A slight difference is visible here between the German and the American sample: While the focus of the religious vocabulary in the American sample lies more in the group of the “equally religious and spiritual,” in the German sample, it lies in the group of the “more religious than spiritual” respondents. This finding supports the thesis that the terms are used less interchangeably in Germany, and that “religion” and “spirituality” are separated more clearly here.
- *Legal and institutional vocabulary* (rules, dogma, organization etc.) is employed primarily by the “more spiritual than religious” group in order to describe “religion” negatively and to separate it from “spirituality.”
- *Experiential vocabulary* (love, desire, feeling, fear etc.), too, serves especially the “more spiritual than religious” as a distinguishing characteristic, but now to positively separate “spirituality” from “religion.” The negative emotion of fear, however, is used in both languages to describe negative experiential consequences of “religion.”
- *Vocabulary expressing irrationality* (nonsense, mythology etc.) is used primarily by “neither religious nor spiritual” participants to critically characterize both “religion” and “spirituality.” A similar phenomenon can be found in the German subsample of the “more religious than spiritual” respondents, who connect “spirituality” with esotericism.

To hypothesize overall semantic tendencies in the transforming and pluralizing field of “religion” and “spirituality,” we conclude from our findings: Compared to “spirituality,” the semantic profile of “religion” appears to be quite reduced to systemic aspects with a pejorative note, while “spirituality” seems to attract a wide range of possible meanings in the field of contrasting poles like “body and soul,” “knowing and feeling,” “spirit and nature,” as well as “connectedness and openness.” Thus, “spirituality” emerges as the clearly richer concept insofar as it is able to cover more positively connoted meanings than “religion.” Beyond this, there are scarcely any other positive aspects left which could be expressed solely by “religion” instead of “spirituality.”

However, we need to be careful and must not draw too far reaching conclusions since we have to be aware of the fact that, due to the sampling procedure, the “more spiritual than religious group” is strongly over-represented in our sample. Thus, although “spirituality” appears to be semantically the clearly richer concept than “religion,” this impression might at least partly be a result of the high number of definitions preferring “spirituality” in comparison to “religion.”

Taking this limitation into account, we nevertheless find the hypothesis confirmed that “religion” and “spirituality” compete in the same semantic field. In the American as well as in the German sample, definitions of both concepts share very similar key words. Where they are different, an institutional tenet-bound notion shifts to the foreground for “religion;” for “spirituality,” however, a subjective experience-oriented understanding is gaining in importance. On the basis of our results, we may speculate: Competing on the same semantic field, “spirituality” seems to have much better chances to succeed than “religion” – at least under the conditions of religiously individualized societies.

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