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Academic Sojourners, Acculturation and Interpersonal Communication: Path Analysis

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Abstract - Communication is viewed as the major underlying process as well as an outcome of the acculturation process. Intercultural communication takes place when individuals influenced by different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in interaction. This article concludes with an assessment of communication variables contributing to acculturation among sojourners. Three casual factors: language fluency (LF), acculturation motivation (AM), and interaction potential (IP) were tested in relation to one another against the originally hypothesized assumptions and the path model. In explaining and predicting sojourners communication behaviors simple correlation, multiple regression, and path analysis were employed. It was found in the present study that interaction potential with host society was shown to be the primary causal factor of the three in facilitating intercultural communication.

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I. Introduction

The term academic sojourner is used for international students who visit new or strange places to receive academic knowledge and return back to their native place after achieving their academic goal (Ward, et al. 2001). Individuals who cross cultures to earn or learn as academic sojourners are perhaps the largest and the earliest group of people who have been communicating with others in different cultures all over the world. (Ross, & Krider 1992; Nelson 1992; Wang 1993; and Ruben 1994). The meetings occur between two societies when individuals travel from their place of origin to another country for a specific purpose and a limited time, such people are called sojourners in the literature (Bochner 2003).

Acculturation or adaptation refers to the individual's relationship with an unfamiliar cultural environment. According to Hall (2002) individuals of a foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits and values of a standard or dominant culture by the cultural process of acculturation.

When strangers move into a new and unfamiliar culture and interact with it, the process of re-socialisation or acculturation occurs. Gradually, they begin to detect similarities and differences within the new surroundings, becoming acquainted with, and adopting some of the norms and values of salient reference groups in the host society (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003). During such acculturation phenomena, the stranger becomes a victim of

confusion, frustration and conflict which presents, according to Kim (2002) a dialectic relationship between push and pull; she explains the growth process in her model and proposes that adaptation is an accumulative but progressive series of positive and negative experiences. Samovar and Porter (2004) defined acculturation as a type of cultural change, which occurs when a society undergoes drastic culture change under the influence of a more dominant culture and society with which it has come in contact with. Kim (2002)-noted that acculturation is a concept dealing with a group of individuals who have different cultures and come into first hand contact, with subsequent changes brought about in the newcomer exposed to a new and different environments Therefore acculturation refers to the process of becoming communicative competent in a culture which is unfamiliar.

Kim (2003) described that personal communication can be viewed as the process of organising adaptive experiences into identifiable cognitive, affective, and operational patterns that are consistent or compatible with the cultural patterns of the host environment. Individual strangers' personal communication patterns, thus, can be conceived in terms of their host communication competence in ways that are consistent with the communication codes, rules, and practices operating in the host culture.

II. Objective & Justification

Investigations of foreign student adaptation have been reported in the literature for over 40 years. Still, this area encountered many unanswered questions due to the diversity in foreign student population and flawed methodologies. Among the studies on intercultural adaptation, the experience of academic sojourners has provided a rather fertile ground for intercultural communication researchers. Earlier research on them tended to identify the various challenges, communication barriers and problems faced by academic sojourners (Jacobson 1963; Furnham & Bochner 1986; Khan 1992), and later studies focused on sojourners' understanding of their host cultures and their communication strategies for effectiveness of their intercultural communication (Martin 1987; Furnham 1988; Adelman 1988; Rohrlich & Martin 1991; Ward &

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Kennedy 1993; Chen 1994), and also on communication trends (Kim 1978; Khan 2001 and 2005).

This article will examine acculturation research with a focus on the vital link between communication and acculturation. Every immigrant is acculturated into the new host society through communication. The immigrant's communication competence facilitates all other aspects of adjustment in the host environment. Communication, then, is understood as the major underlying process as well as an outcome of the acculturation process.

III. Perceptual Complexity

Perception is the process of selecting, organising, and interpreting sensory data in a way that enables us to make sense of our world (Gamble and Gamble, 1996). In this process a person perceives a wide variety of things about another and makes finer interpersonal discriminations and changes than cognitively simple individuals. Martin (2002) elaborates this process when strangers find that their attempts at perspective-taking to-determine how and why others will respond to their communication behaviours, are uncertain and ambiguous. The process of trial and error in communication attempts is interspersed with attempts to give meaning to the new behaviours by observing the response of others.

One of the most fundamental adaptation changes in personal communication (or host communication competence) occurs in the cognitive structure/conceptual process through which strangers process information from the environment. Communication between the stranger and the host is successful to the extent that the stranger is able to comprehend the categorizing system of the host and match their own cognitive activities (Kim, 2003).

Strangers face certain degrees of uncertainty much like individuals moving from one place to another within the same country. They must find ways to make sense out of their environment in order to adapt to it. They try to categorise events and people into certain moulds, thus stereotyping culture becomes salient as a screening device when strangers-need to maintain the easiest and most economical structure in their perception of unfamiliar people and the social milieu.

Therefore, perceptual complexity is defined as the extent of cultural knowledge and familiarity with all aspects of the host society. This includes the groups, institutions and sub-groups, the attitudes, beliefs and values of the members and non-members. Since the knowledge of culture of a structurally complex group can never be complete, even in the case of life-long membership of the group, the newcomer's degree of knowledge should be judged in relative terms. Perceptual structure is an important variable because it allows the sojourner (the term sojourner and stranger are used interchangeably in this paper) to perceive many goals and the means to their attainment. It provides a more adequate means of relating the sojourner to the host society (Khan,-1990).

IV. Interpersonal Communication

Several studies have examined interpersonal communication by looking at the volumes of interpersonal relationships sojourners have with members of the host society, (Kim, 1980; Kim, 2002; Gudykunst and Kim, 2003). The underlying assumption here is that interpersonal relationship patterns indicate the degree and quality of information as the sojourner learns about the host society and its culture. Interpersonal communication occurs in interpersonal relationships, which in turn, represents the purpose, functions and product of an individual's interpersonal communication.

In studying interpersonal relationships, informal relationships (friendship with the host) are distinguished from formal relationships (membership and participation with host). Studies have found that those who tend to seek both formal and informal relationships with the host culture in social situations have not only greater potential for, but also actually achieve a higher level for acculturation (Khan, 1992).

The sojourner's interpersonal communication-can be observed through the degree of his participation in interpersonal relationships with members of the host society. More specifically, one can infer the nature of his interpersonal networks. A sojourner with a predominantly ethnic interpersonal network can be considered less acculturated than a sojourner whose associates are primarily members of the host society. In addition, the degree of intimacy in the host society is an important indicator of his acquired host communication competence (Khan, 1992).

As explained earlier, a perceptual process is the underlying means by which people organise their experience. It is the way in which information is received, processed and. retransmitted, all of which are vital to the communication process. One of the important aspects of one's perceptual structure in relation to the acculturation process is that it is dependent upon developmental conditions. Acculturation does not occur in everyone's life in the same way. Some people are motivated while others are not. The level of perceptual process in a given area is not necessarily held static over time. As has been demonstrated through research of foreign students and visitors, a sojourner's perception of the host society will become more complex and refined as he learns more about the host culture (Khan, 1992). Here, the sojourner's differentiated view of the host society is considered to be a product of life experience from multidimensional perspectives. On the other hand, a simpler perceptual process is indicative of the more global and unidimensional perspective that any form of cultural learning occurs through

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communication. The growth of a differentiated view of the host society is facilitated by the accumulation of the stranger's communication experiences in the host society. Through interpersonal communication with the host society; he is able to comprehend wider and more complex perspectives than his own.

a) Based on the Aforementioned Discussion, the Following Hypothesis Is Developed

Hypothesis 1: The more a student participates in interpersonal communication with members of the host society, his perception of the host society will become more complex and refined.

V. Language Fluency

One of the most frequently used ideas to understand the role of language in our thoughts and actions is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that language unconsciously determines how we perceive the world. Thus, the limit of our language becomes the limit of our world. Our actions are connected tend to our language because we are assumed to act based on our perceptions of the world and these perceptions are determined by our language (Hall, 2002).

To speak to someone in her or his native language is an indisputable part of the adaptation process. In adaptation studies more extensive attention has been devoted to the effectiveness of language orientation in promoting acculturation. Often the type of language used by an ethnic group and the proficiency of such usage has been the measure of the extent of acculturation.

Therefore, language fluency as an important determinant of the sojourner's exposure to the host society empirically supports a positive correlation that exists between language and general adjustment. Ability to communicate has been proposed as a factor in both the extent of acculturation and the degree of positive evaluation made by the sojourners (Valeh, 1985; Bohleke, 1986; Khan 1992; De Verdi, 1995; Samovar and Porter, 2000; and Kim, 2003).

The above cited empirically supported evidence provides enough insights to further postulate that a student's competence in speaking and understanding host language facilitates his/her interpersonal interaction with members of the host society, in this study, Bangla.

Hypothesis 2: "The more fluent a student is in the host language, the greater will be his/her participation interpersonal communication in the host society".

VI. Acculturation Motivation

The second important variable in relation to the student's communication behaviour is his acculturation motivation. The term "acculturation motivation is defined simply as the student's desire to learn about, and participate in the host society. Dodds (1998) reports "if a person is highly motivated to be accultured, he or she usually becomes more culturally involved with group memberships in the host culture and develops more friends from that host culture than a person who is not motivated to acculturate". Here, a student does not necessarily have to change his values and attitudes or ethnic group in order to understand the host society and to engage in intercultural communication.

Hypothesis 3: "The greater a student's acculturation motivation, the greater will be his/her participation in interpersonal communication with members of the host society".

VII. Interaction Potential

The term interaction potential is conceptualised as the amount of actual or potential interaction between the sojourner and the surrounding host community. Ordinarily, if a situation does not have any interaction potential at all, it must provide for the physical proximity of two or more persons. Beyond this basic requirement, the situation differs greatly in interaction Potential. For example, one does not usually talk to a stranger in the subway or in the bus; if on the other hand, one is assigned to work with him on a collaborative task, he would soon cease to be a stranger. Such situations almost demand communication of some sort, and make it easy to go beyond superficial exchange if one wishes to; in other words, they are high in interaction potential. Thus, foreign students studying in local institutes dealing with Bangladeshi fellow students will have a greater chance to develop or less meaningful relationships with Bangla.

Hypothesis 4; "The greater a student's interpersonal interaction potential the greater will be his participation in interpersonal communication with the host society"

VIII. A Path Model of Acculturation

After developing causal links, the three causal factors are language fluency (LF), acculturation motivation (AM), and interpersonal potential (IP) with perceptual complexity (PC) in perceiving the host society. As pointed out earlier, it is hypothesised that individual differences in three variables will influence cognitive structure through interpersonal experiences with the host society. In other words, there would be a weak or no direct relationship between three causal variables and the perception patterns of the sojourners. Fluency in the host language, motivation to learn and interaction potential of the sojourner will not have any significant effect on perceptual complexity unless there is some meaningful interpersonal communication experience with the host society.

Hypothesis 5: "The complexity with which-a student perceives the host society will be influenced by language fluency, motivational level and interaction potential mediated by interpersonal communication".

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IX. Method

The data for the study was obtained from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Bangladesh Agricultural University including Government and private Medical Colleges, as hosting the foreign students from neighboring countries (India, Pakistan and Nepal). In order to test the hypotheses of the study, the questionnaire was administered among 80 foreign students enrolled during 2012 academic year. In the present study, perceptual complexity was operationalised by measuring the degree of concreteness (or extremity) in responding to the 12 adjective statements describing and evaluating Bangladeshi students (Bangladeshis are affectionate, have sense of humour, peace-loving, frivolous, industrious, arrogant, optimistic, trustful.etc.) with six alternative responses provided.

Interpersonal communication activities with the host society enable sojourners to experience their "immediate environment". A foreign student's involvement with members of the host society was measured by the volume and intimacy of his informal social relationships with locals and organisations (cultural groups like Chayaknot, Udichi, Compash Nattya Shomproday for music and drama, Shondhani and Badhan for blood donation) to with he was connected as a regular member.

The index of interpersonal communication was the sum of the number of locals with whom the respondent reportedly had interpersonal communication relationships.

Interaction potential operationalised as accessibility to interpersonal channels of the host society was measured by the respondent's estimation of the percentage of Bangla contacts out of the total daily contacts i.e., of all daily personal contacts you make, what percentage is with Bangladeshi/ locals, how often have you worked with Bangladeshis, sought help from them, attended their social functions, shared meals outside, and visiting local friends (in Eid/Poja vacations) during last six months.

The foreign student's acculturation motivation was measured by three questions concerning his level of interest in learning the norms and culture of the host society, in making friends with Bangladeshis, and leaning the current issues in Bangladesh.

Language fluency was measured in terms of difficulty in understanding Bangladeshis/ locals when they speak Bangla, and the frequency of hesitation in talking to Bangladeshis/ locals due to their language difficulty. It was assumed that the respondent's own subjective evaluation of his/her language competence was probably as influenced by his/her interpersonal communication behavior as the actual command of the language.

X. Results of Path Analysis

The Path coefficients for the original model were obtained by three regression analysis. First, perceptual complexity was regressed on interpersonal communication. Next, interpersonal communication was regressed on language fluency, acculturation motivation, and interpersonal interaction potential. Finally, perceptual complexity was regressed on the causal variables i.e., language fluency, acculturation motivation, and interpersonal potential. Before the meaning of this path coefficient could be interpreted, the validity of the model had to be tested in terms of the effectiveness of the path coefficients in reproducing the original correlations among the variables (Pedhauzer, 1982).

The postulated relationship between each of the three causal factors; language fluency, acculturation motivation, and interaction potential on interpersonal communication behaviours were all confirmed to be satisfactorily significant. The zero-order correlation coefficient [r], the coefficients of determination [r2] and the significant level [p] of each of all independent variables with the dependent variable interpersonal communication, are reported in Table 1. Language fluency, acculturation motivation, and interaction potential were found to be significant in their influence on interpersonal communication.

Table 1 : Simple Linear Regression of Language Fluency, Acculturation Motivation, and Interaction Potential on Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal Communication			
Independent Variables	r	r^2	p
Language Fluency	.47 (.00)	.22	.00
Acculturation Motivation	.26 (.00)	.07	.00
Interaction Potential	.43 (.00)	.18	.00

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When interpersonal communication was regressed on the dependent variable i.e. perceptual complexity, the independent variable explained 0.13 of the total variation in conceptual complexity, which was significant enough to develop a path model. The relative path coefficient and zero-order correlation coefficient of the independent variable is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2 : Multiple Regressions of Interpersonal Communication on Perceptual Complexity

Dependent Variable = Perceptual Complexity					
Independent Variables	Simple r/p	Multiple r	Path coeff/p	Overall r^2	Change. in r^2
Interpersonal Communication	-.35 (.00)	.36	.37 (.00)	.132	.13

Path Coefficient shown without parentheses.
Zero-Order Correlation shown with parentheses.

The relative importance of the three causal factors in explaining interpersonal communication behaviour was determined by multiple regression analysis. The path coefficient between interpersonal communications and the three causal factors acculturation motivation, interaction potential and language fluency were found to be significantly different from zero. The results are reported in Table 3. It was clearly demonstrated that a foreign student's proportion of daily contact with local students i.e., acculturation motivation, interaction potential and language fluency explained 22 percent of total variation in involvement in interpersonal communication with members of the host society.

Table 3 : Multiple Regression of Interaction Potential, Language Fluency, and Acculturation Motivation, on Interpersonal Communication

Dependent Variable = Interpersonal Communication					
	Simple r/p	Multiple r	Path coeff/p	Overall r^2	Change in r^2
Independent Variables					
Interaction Potential	.43 (.00)	.41	.29 (.00)	.17	.17
Language Fluency	.47 (.00)	.47	.28 (.00)	.22	.05
Acculturation Motivation	.26 (.00)	.47	.04 (.55)	.22	.00

Path Coefficient shown without parentheses.
Zero-Order Correlation shown with parentheses.

Constructing the path model assumed that path coefficients between perceptual complexity and each of the exogenous variables (language fluency, acculturation motivation, interaction potential) should be -zero or not significantly different from zero (Hypothesis 5) To test this model, all the factors that indirectly influence the relationship between the exogenous variables and the ultimate endogenous variable (perceptual complexity) were partially out. As a result, the direct path coefficient's availability of interaction potential turned out to be close to zero (.10). Thus, this result partially supported the underlying assumptions of the expected model. The relative path coefficient of the exogenous variables in relation to the measure of perceptual complexity is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4 : Multiple Regressions of Acculturation Motivation, Language Fluency and Interaction Potential on Perceptual Complexity

Dependent Variable = Interpersonal Communication					
	Simple r/p	Multiple r	Path coeff/p	Overall r^2	Change in r^2
Independent Variables					
Acculturation Motivation	.16 (.03)	.15	.26 (.01)	.02	.02

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Language Fluency	.16 (.03)	.29	.28	(.00)	.09	.06
Interaction Potential	.03 (.33)	.32	.10	(.33)	.10	.00

Path Coefficient shown without parentheses.
Zero-Order Correlation shown with parentheses.

XI. Discussion

To summarise the findings, the results of data analysis did not support all the postulated hypotheses except #1 and #5 which were partially supported by the data. However, the multiple complexities of language fluency, acculturation motivation and interaction potential in explaining participation in interpersonal communication with the host society were negatively established. Secondly, it demonstrated that of the causal factors, language fluency and interaction potential were the two most powerful factors in explaining interpersonal communication. This result is also in accordance with the findings that learning the local language is one of the strategies used by informants (foreign students) in coping with cross cultural interaction Tamam, 2003). But the results showed that the degree of participation in interpersonal communication influences cognitive complexity negatively in perceiving the host society. The influence of only one causal factor i.e., interaction potential on perceptual complexity was not direct and was not mediated by interpersonal communication behaviour. Whereas interaction potential had no direct influence on perceptual complexity. Unexpectedly, it was found that the path coefficient of acculturation motivation on perceptual complexity was significantly different from zero, but having a retarding effect while the path coefficient of language fluency on perceptual complexity was significantly different from zero.

The observed model showed negative path coefficient between exogenous and endogenous variables which could be due to personality factors, dissimilarity with the host culture and the sojourner's country's socio- economic conditions. As a matter of fact, culture learning is often trial and error, and inaccurate knowledge can have negative consequences in understanding between sojourner students and the member of the host society. There is every likelihood that differences between the cultures of these two groups may have retarded effect on intercultural communication. There has been a great deal of research investigating the impact of sojourners, but results have been contradictory and inconsistent. Using Kim's measures of intercultural identity could contribute to this area of research.

The contribution of interpersonal communication to the development of a refined and realistic perception and understanding of the host society was proved to be strongly significant. In most of the cases the relationship among these variables was negative, which could be due to the differences. Between the two groups of population under study that led to different results. However, those sojourners who communicate more with host society were partially confirmed.

Finally, a few limitations should be mentioned. The reliability of some scales was not higher and only one item was used to access the level of cognitive complexity. Nevertheless, in most cases we found clear differences in accordance with our hypotheses and the results have a negative consequence in understanding between sojourner students and members of the host society.

XII. Conclusion

The acculturation process lies the communication process linking sojourners to the host cultural milieu. Acquisition of communicative competence by sojourners is not only instrumental to all aspects of cultural adaptation but also indicative of the strangers' accomplished acculturation. In other words, the degree to which strangers adapt to the host culture depends on their personal and social communication processes. At the same time, the adaptive changes that have already taken place are reflected in the strangers' communication patterns

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