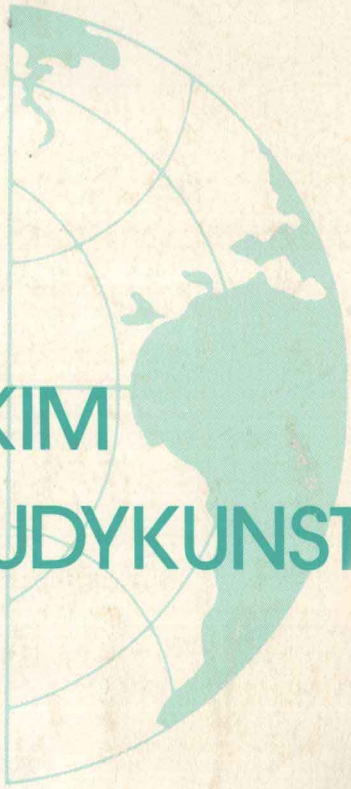
CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

CURRENT APPROACHES



edited by

Young Yun KIM
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Preface

The flow of humans across national and cultural boundaries is more active than ever before. In a single year, millions around the world relocate from country to country. Among them are diplomats and other intergovernmental agency employees, business men and women on international assignments, researchers working in cultures other than their own, students attending academic institutions overseas, military personnel on foreign duty, and missionaries carrying out their religious services. Then there are refugees and immigrants who are on the move across societal boundaries—in search of freedom, security, and social, economic, or cultural betterment.

In this worldwide context of cross-cultural migration, the concept "adaptation" takes on a special social and academic significance, not only here in the United States but also in many other countries that receive immigrants, refugees, and sojourners. This volume presents current studies dealing with the cross cultural adaptation of individuals who are born and raised in one culture and find themselves in need of modifying their customary life patterns in a foreign culture.

The present volume is the eleventh of the *International and Intercultural Communication Annual.* This publication is sponsored by the Speech Communication Association Division of International and Intercultural Communication. Beginning with Volume VII, the *Annual* has focused on specific themes as captured in the volume titles: *Intercultural Communication Theory* (VII), *Methods for Intercultural Communication Research* (VIII), *Intercultural Communication in Organizations* (IX), and *Interethnic Communication: Current Approaches* (X). The guiding principle in preparing for this volume was to present theoretical and research studies that focus primarily on *individ-*

uals in examining the cross-cultural adaptation process. To maximize the representation of interdisciplinary approaches to the present theme, a call for papers was announced in newsletters of all major behavioral-social science associations in the United States. Additionally, a number of prominent individuals, both in the United States and in other countries, were invited to participate in this volume.

Thus we have brought together some of the most current conceptualizations and research findings on cross-cultural adaptation. The 14 chapters reflect the multidisciplinary and multisocietal approaches that exist today. The authors are from the disciplines of psychology, communication, and anthropology; they reside in Australia, Canada, England, Sweden, and the United States. Individually and collectively, they present ideas and research findings that contribute to the further development of our scientific understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural adaptation.

THE THEME: ADAPTATION OF CULTURAL STRANGERS

The international migrants who travel in both time and geographical space achieve an "existential alertness." International migration represents a situation in which the newly arrived individuals are required to cope with substantial cultural change. Although situations of migration vary in the degree to which the transition is abrupt or smooth, voluntary or involuntary, and temporary or permanent, all individuals in a new cultural milieu share common adaptation experiences. All are "strangers" in a foreign land, and no one can completely escape from the demands of the new life setting. Every stranger in a new culture must cope with a high level of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. The task of all cultural strangers is to acquire the necessary competence to function satisfactorily, at least at a minimal level.

Being at risk, moving into a new and unfamiliar land makes cultural strangers alert and quick to learn. Sooner or later, the cultural strangers come to structure, or better make sense of, a personally relevant situation in the host society. Handling the

transactions of daily living necessitates detecting similarities and differences between the surrounding host society and the home culture. They gradually become acquainted with various aspects of living in any given environment; from maintaining basic survival necessities—physical safety and health—to working for their livelihood, developing relationships, and enjoying leisure activities. They become increasingly proficient in handling their daily activities in the new culture with improved skills to deal with the situations they encounter.

This process of cross-cultural adaptation is the theme of this volume. The term *cross-cultural adaptation* is used here in a broad and all-inclusive sense to refer to the complex process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of "fitness" or "compatibility" in the new cultural environment. The term is also intended to accommodate other similar terms such as *acculturation, assimilation,* and *adjustment.*

THE FIELD: A BACKGROUND

The study of cross-cultural adaptation has been active in the United States, a nation in which immigrants and ethnic diversity have always been a major reality and an issue of serious concern. Comparatively, immigrant adaptation studies have been more recent and less extensive in the academic traditions of European countries. Cross-cultural adaptation, because of its multiple facets and dimensions, has been viewed from many angles and measured in terms of various aspects and categories such as changes in economic condition, perception, attitude, behavior, linguistic proficiency, and ethnic/cultural identity. Each of these categories, in turn, has included diverse elements that could be examined separately with varying degrees of scientific legitimacy. Social scientists today are far from being homogeneous in intellectual orientations in studying the adaptation process.

The literature related to cross-cultural adaptation has accumulated since the turn of the century. Serious work began in cultural anthropology and sociology that focused primarily on the level of immigrant/cultural groups rather than on the level of individuals. Many anthropological studies have investigated cultures (pri-

marily "primitive" cultures) that were going through changes as the result of continuous contact with another culture. The term *acculturation* has been used in anthropological literature to refer to "those phenomena which result when *groups* of individuals have different cultures and come into first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both *groups*" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149; emphasis added).

As indicated in this definition, the discipline of anthropology has treated acculturation primarily as a group phenomenon. In examining the acculturation of various groups, anthropological studies have often observed the importance of the presence of kin, friends, and ethnic affiliates. These and other aspects of urban ethnic communities have been investigated in anthropological studies as a key agency facilitating the acculturation of new immigrants (Snyder, 1976; also Chapter 13 in this volume).

While the majority of anthropological studies have observed changes and activities in the culture of the target group itself, sociological studies have primarily focused on issues pertaining to social stratification, that is, hierarchical classification of ethnic groups based on the unequal distribution of resources, power, and prestige (see Parrillo, 1966, p. 80). In addition, many sociological studies have analyzed the patterns and processes by which immigrant (ethnic) groups are integrated into the political, social, and economic structure of the host society, and the dynamics of relationships within and among minority and majority groups (see Glazer & Moynihan, 1970, 1975; Gordon, 1964; Spiro, 1955). The terms *ethnicity* and *assimilation,* in addition to *acculturation,* have been frequently used in sociological literature.

More recently, an increasing amount of academic attention has been given to cross-cultural adaptation on the individual level. Numerous studies in psychology (or social psychology), psychiatry, communication, and other related disciplines have focused on individual immigrants and sojourners since the 1950s. While studies of immigrants' adaptation are a natural extension of the "older" group-level approaches, studies of short-term adaptation of sojourners were stimulated by the post-Second World War

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boom in student exchanges and by the Peace Corps movement. In the sojourn studies, psychological terms such as *culture shock, adjustment* and *social integration* have been used to refer to the sojourners experiences in the new environment.

One of the earlier views of long-term immigrant adaptation was presented by Taft (1957, and Chapter 7 in this volume). He delineated seven stages of "assimilation," progressively from the "cultural learning" stage to the "congruence" stage. These stages were based on a number of key psychological concepts (such as "attitude," "frame of reference," and "role behavior") that were considered to influence an individual's adaptation process. Another view was provided by Berry and his associates (1980, and Chapter 3 in this volume), who identified four types of "acculturation" ("integration," "assimilation," "rejection," and "marginality"). This fourfold model was proposed by Berry and his associates based on an immigrant's adherence to the original cultural identity and attitude toward the host society. In addition, Y. Kim (1979, in press) proposed a multidimensional, interactive theory of immigrant "acculturation." Kim's theory incorporates the psychological and social processes of immigrants in interacting with their host environment. In this approach, the individual immigrant's personal, interpersonal, and media communication activities are viewed as central to his or her acculturation.

Compared to approaches to immigrants' long-term adaptation, the studies of short-term adaptation have placed a greater emphasis on the psychological well-being and mental health of cultural strangers in encountering unfamiliar environmental demands. Such concern is based on the common recognition of the "problemetic" nature of the cross-cultural adaptation process. This problem orientation is reflected in the frequent reference in literature to "culture shock" and similar terms such as *transition shock* or *culture fatigue* (see Chapter 2 by Furnham and Chapter 8 by Torbiorn). Closely related to this orientation is the emphasis on the "U-curve" or "W-curve" process of change in the attitude and satisfaction level of sojourners (see Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

Another group of studies has focused on the "effectiveness" of sojourners in foreign cultural environments. These studies have

attempted to identify a set of "independent" variables that are considered to promote or deter the effectiveness of sojourners overseas. Different studies have, however, focused on different factors that influence the overseas effectiveness, as recently summarized by Kealey and Ruben (1983).

TOWARD AN INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE APPROACHES

Today, the serious scholar of cross-cultural adaptation has thousands of books and articles that must be studied for a complete understanding of work in this area. A wide variety of literature and data sources makes it difficult for any one individual to gain familiarity with all of the literature across the disciplinary boundaries. Although the field has benefited from the richness of the literature that reports information and insights regarding various aspects of the cross-cultural adaptation process, it has also suffered from increased specialization and complexity. Often, confusion has resulted from the application of divergent viewpoints, definitions, and methodologies peculiar to different disciplinary perspectives. The studies of immigrants and of sojourners have been more or less separate and independent from each other with little cross-fertilization, although many common features have been discussed in the respective areas of study.

Some of the diversity and complexity that characterizes the field is reflected in this volume. Within this diversity, however, this volume presents an integration between the theoretical and empirical research endeavors, between the psychological, communication, and anthropological approaches, and between the studies of long-term and short-term adaptation. Each of the six theoretical essays in Part I presents an effort to provide a synthesis of the relevant concepts and perspectives. In Chapter 1, Pearce and Kang lay a metatheoretical groundwork for theorists in interpreting cultural differences embedded in individuals' communication patterns—a key aspect of cross-cultural adaptation. The authors analyze the monocultural, ethnocentric perspective prevalent in the tradition of "objective" inquiries and propose the "new paradigm" that emphasizes the fundamental role played

by culture in studying the communication behavior of individuals. Pearce and Kang also discuss an isomorphism between the experiences of immigrants adapting to cross-cultural differences and to the experiences of all individuals in contemporary societies adapting to their rapidly changing cultural milieu.

In Chapter 2, Furnham attempts to integrate the widely diffuse area of sojourner adaptation. The varied definitions and conceptualizations of "sojourners," "adjustment," and "culture shock" are critically examined. The author looks into the almost exclusive emphasis on the negative aspects in existing views of sojourner adaptation, and carefully evaluates eight possible theoretical explanations for culture shock. Taking a somewhat broader perspective, Berry, U. Kim, and Boski provide in Chapter 3 an overview of the various concepts associated with cross-cultural adaptation of individuals. The authors also present a model of "psychological acculturation," in which different adaptation patterns of five types of groups (immigrants, refugees, native peoples, ethnic groups, and sojourners) are identified.

The next two theoretical approaches in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are based on communication-oriented concepts. In Chapter 4, McGuire and McDermott introduce a communication-based model that explains the process of immigrant adaptation. This model focuses on the "assimilation" and the "alienation" states as two opposite end-states, and "deviance" as the intermediate state, of individual immigrants' communication in the host cultural environment. The key concept employed by McGuire and McDermott to explain these different communication states is the "communication denial" perceived by individual immigrants. The other communication-based theory, explicated by Gudykunst and Hammer in Chapter 5, focuses on the "uncertainty reduction" and the accompanying "anxiety" as two central theoretical concepts. This approach accommodates both immigrants and sojourners as cultural "strangers" in an unfamiliar cultural environment, and explicates axioms and theorems that relate the two central concepts with various other factors that accompany the adaptation process.

The theoretical perspective presented in Chapter 6 by Yoshikawa can be described as a humanistic-psychological-philosophical approach with a specific focus on the perceptual development

in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Yoshikawa views the cross-cultural adaptation process as a creative process that shares an analogous relationship with scientific discovery and religious enlightenment. Incorporating both the Western and Eastern traditions of idea, the author places a particular emphasis on the "double-swing" stage as an advanced stage of perceptual refinement.

Part II presents eight recent empirical studies dealing with cross-cultural adaptation that differ in their respective research foci and variables. Taft, in Chapter 7, presents his theoretical framework of immigrant adaptation. As described previously, Taft views immigrant adaptation in terms of five "facets" (such as "adjustment" "national and ethnic identity," "cultural competence," and "role acculturation"). Based on this perspective, Taft reports some of the findings (as well as measurements) from a study of Soviet immigrants in Australia.

While Taft's approach covers a wide range of adaptation-related ideas, Torbiorn concentrates on one important aspect: "cultural barriers" in Chapter 8. Torbiorn theorizes that the cultural barrier experienced by an individual sojourner varies according to "objective" cultural differences between the original culture and the host culture and reports some empirical support for this theory from a study of Swedish expatriates in 26 countries. Similarly, Yum's study reported in Chapter 9 focuses on the "locus of control" of individuals as the key concept that influences some of the communication patterns of immigrants. Yum tested this theoretical relationship among five ethnic groups in Hawaii, and reports a generally supportive empirical evidence for the hypothesized relationship.

In Chapter 10, Szalay and Inn investigate the "psychocultural meaning systems" of five Hispanic immigrant groups in the United States. Employing the Associative Group Analysis method to assess and compare the respective group's meaning system, the authors report findings that clearly suggest an adaptive change in the immigrants toward the mainstream American way of thinking. In Chapter 11, Mägiste reports a study of German and Polish immigrant groups in Sweden focusing on the developmental changes in the cerebral "lateralization" patterns. Employing

various linguistic measures, Mägiste observed decreasing left hemisphere involvement with increasing proficiency in Swedish in the immigrants.

In Chapter 12, Punetha, Giles, and Young report a study of three immigrant groups (Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims) in England, as well as the native Britons. The study explores the psychological distances between groups as assessed by their perceptions and evaluations of each other. These intergroup perceptions and evaluations are then linked to each group's collective self-esteem and satisfaction about prevailing societal conditions.

The next two studies by Zenner (Chapter 13) and by Mortland and Ledgerwood (Chapter 14) employ "qualitative" research methods in analyzing immigrant communities. Zenner presents a historical-cultural account of four Jewish immigrant groups in the United States in order to demonstrate the conflicts among them in spite of their common Jewish ethnic and religious identity. This analysis is presented as a case study to demonstrate the complex dynamics within an ethnic community in the host society and the influence of such an ethnic community on the individual in adapting to the larger American society. Similarly, Mortland and Ledgerwood analyze the ethnic communication network in a Southeast Asian refugee community in the United States. The authors argue that such an informal network serves the community as a vital "patronage" system, controlling the flow of information and resources between the host society, its service agencies and the refugee population.

All in all, the 14 chapters in this volume, individually and collectively, make a special contribution to the field of cross-cultural adaptation. Each chapter presents a perspective and emphasis in conceptualizing or researching the adaptation process. There exists some inconsistent use of terminologies as authors emphasize different aspects of cross-cultural adaptation and the related phenomena. Yet, each of these chapters offers unique knowledge and insight that contributes to moving the field toward a more complete and integrated understanding of the cross-cultural adaptation process.

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Finally, this work owes its worth to the dedication and labor of the authors. On their behalf, I present this volume. I sincerely hope it will facilitate even greater interdisciplinary, international fertilization of academic talents. Together, we will be able to reach an integrated, comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural adaptation—one of the most socially relevant topics of inquiry today.

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