Cross-Cultural Research Methods

RICHARD W. BRISLIN

Culture Learning Institute
East-West Center

WALTER J. LONNER

Center for Cross-Cultural Research
Department of Psychology
Western Washington State College

ROBERT M. THORNDIKE

Department of Psychology
Western Washington State College

A Wiley-Interscience Publication

JOHN WILEY & SONS
New York • London • Sydney • Toronto

Tables 9.1, 9.3, and 9.4 and the formulas on page 269 are reprinted by permission from Harry H. Harmon, *Modern Factor Analysis,* © 1960, 1967 by The University of Chicago Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:

Brislin, Richard W 1945-
Cross-cultural research methods.

(Comparative studies in behavioral sciences)
Bibliography: p.
1. Ethnopsychology–Methodology. 2. Social sciences–Methodology. I. Lonner, Walter J., joint author. II. Thorndike, Robert M., joint author. III. Title. [DNLM: 1. Anthropology, Cultural. 2. Cross-cultural comparison. 3. Social behavior. GN·400 B859c 1973]

GN273.B7 155.8'01'8 73-772
ISBN 0-471-10470-1

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Comparative Studies in Behavioral Science:

A WILEY SERIES

Robert T. Holt and John E. Turner, *Editors*
Department of Political Science
University of Minnesota

The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry
by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune

The Analysis of Subjective Culture
by Harry C. Triandis

Comparative Legislative Behavior: Frontiers of Research
edited by Samuel C. Patterson and John C. Wahlke

Mass Political Violence: A Cross-National Causal Analysis
by Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr.

Cross-Cultural Research Methods
by Richard W. Brislin, Walter J. Lonner, and Robert M. Thorndike

Foreword

There are many, many good reasons why psychologists and their adherents should be interested in cross-cultural research. Hypotheses and hunches concerning socialized behavior derived from caged animals, captured college students, and patients or normal adults in Western society need to be tested and perhaps modified in cultures having different traditions and confronted with diverse environmental conditions. Those contributors to scholarly journals who write as if they had examined a representative sample of the world's population or who first describe what they have done in the past tense and then suggest they have established an eternal verity by suddenly switching to the present tense in the discussion sections of their papers would not perpetrate such illicit, sly generalizing if they were to imagine how persons in Asia, Africa, Central Australia, Latin America, or the Arctic regions might react to their methodological procedures. New phenomena are observed, new ideas are virtually inevitable the moment one plunges into a strange group without resisting the thrills from culture shock—and if you think I exaggerate you need only thumb through the rest of this book. Each society has its own somewhat unique problems and offers equally novel research opportunities. Then there are straight facts to be gathered, facts describing the differences between us and them or attempting to chart systematically the changes they are or are not undergoing in this merry miserable world. Such facts are valuable in their own right because facts are always patently needed and because now or later, we think, they contribute to systematic theory.

Most psychologists are human beings and are able to find ethical or personal reasons to embark on jet planes to reach research sites. Developing nations actually seek, or can be made to realize that they should seek, psychologists to help solve some of their political or educational problems. Help means research. Few of us know or can acquire the languages spoken by peoples outside our conventional linguistic orbit; some of the translators and research assistants we employ eventually can be trained to succeed us in universities, governments, or

private organizations. Here is only one of the quid-pro-quo's foreigners can offer hosts who provide research opportunities. Indeed, if the investigator's research is truly beneficial, he may lighten the cross Americans carry abroad as a result of the reputation of the C.I.A. and the bad manners of some of our predecessors who have ruthlessly interfered with people's lives by pushing their own research at all costs or who have failed to send back the promised report, reprint, or monograph.

Of course, whoever conducts cross-cultural research benefits over and beyond the additions to his bibliography. Unless he isolates himself in an enclave of compatriots, he becomes a little less ethnocentric. He is compelled to view the problems of his discipline and of his own society somewhat differently. He may possibly be able to feel like a citizen of the world without diminishing the meaningfully emotional components of his own patriotism.

The advantages of cross-cultural research in psychology—or any social science for that matter—are thus evident, *but* conducting cross-cultural research is not like stepping into a cozy laboratory or clinic. Much more than the tricky task of translating from one language to another confronts psychologists working in foreign countries. We have in this volume, really for the first time, a detailed, sophisticated exposition of the numerous salient problems arising when any method in the behavioral sciences is employed outside its area of origin. Forever after psychologists departing for the field can alert themselves to the difficulties they will face in planning and executing their research. In addition, the experimentalist and the clinician who are busy at home as well as students or the intellectually curious are here provided with solid bases for evaluating the cross-cultural studies they bring to their own attention. Bravo, thanks, we say to Professors Brislin and Lonner for offering this lucid, balanced guide through the jungle and to Professor Thorndike for patiently explaining how some of the more intricate statistical tools can facilitate the trek.

We are also grateful to the authors for a decision they made at the outset, wittingly or unwittingly. It would have been not only dull and boring but also undesirable and perhaps impossible to blueprint cross-cultural methodology without copious, relevant, and appealing examples. As a result the reader will find in every single chapter more than a catalog of do's and dont's. If fact, if I may discharge the conventional function of a foreword to a book, which is to preview and praise the contents, virtually every significant cross-cultural study having even remote psychological implications has been cogently summarized and in many instances intriguingly illustrated. Toward the end the authors fortunately stray so far from the purposes set forth in their first chapter that they provide us with provoking generalizations and sagacious suggestions concerning theory-building. Another bravo.

I must note one more praiseworthy misdemeanor that makes this book more valuable than the modest authors may have intended. The research they report

has emerged, according to them, "within the last twenty-five years," though I think a careless or careful glance at their impressive list of references shows that most of it is less than a decade old. During this period the boundaries between psychology and the other social sciences have become thinner and thinner until it is frequently impossible to find them. The title of the present volume explicitly suggests that it is "concerned with psychology," but what do we find in its pages? Shockingly copious and refreshing references to the methods and discoveries of researchers who belong officially to other academic guilds, especially anthropology. It is pleasing to note here the Zeitgeist, since it has promoted a virtuous departure from an arbitrary convention that used to block interdisciplinary creativity.

Two serious caveats, which I cannot suppress. It should be obvious from what I have been saying, and it will be calmly demonstrated throughout this book, that cross-cultural research is incredibly exciting and rewarding. But investigation in exotic places is not all whiskey and curry. You may not get a visa to the country of your choice or, even if you do, you may not obtain permission to carry on research. You may get sick. You may even be lonesome. Your informants may not be punctual or they may never appear. Your well-laid plan formulated at home in the peaceful quiet of a library or an office may turn out to be unreal. And so on—on and on. Little wonder that most graduate students in psychology find it easier to obtain their union cards and their instructors to add to their fame, and occasionally their fortunes, by studying domesticated persons and animals within a short distance from their home ruts. Courage is needed to work cross-culturally; hence the rewards may be greater.

The synthesis of psychology and the other social sciences that must take into account the generalizations resulting from cross-cultural research is not close at hand. This book pushes us an appreciable distance forward, which is cause for grateful joy without doubt. Anyone toiling in the vineyard, however, must confront himself solipsistically: are not cross-cultural problems similar to or at any rate not qualitatively different from those existing when one person would comprehend another person within the same culture? Ostensibly we speak the same language, but do we? In this nonmetaphorical sense each of us is a culture, and therefore the unsolved problems so well illuminated by our three guides are also our own pathetic perplexities almost every moment of existence.

Leonard W. Doob

SERIES PREFACE

The last decade has witnessed the burgeoning of comparative studies in the behavioral sciences. Scholars in specific disciplines have come to realize that they share much with experts in other fields who face similar theoretical and methodological problems and whose research findings are often related. Moreover, specialists in a given geographic area have felt the need to look beyond the limited confines of their region and to seek new meaning in their research results by comparing them with studies that have been made elsewhere.

This series is designed to meet the needs of the growing cadre of scholars in comparative research. The emphasis is on cross-disciplinary studies, although works within the perspective of a single discipline are included. In its scope, the series includes books of theoretical and methodological interest, as well as studies that are based on empirical research. The books in the series are addressed to scholars in the various behavioral science disciplines, to graduate students, and to undergraduates in advanced standing.

Robert T. Holt
John E. Turner

University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Preface

In both 1954 and 1968, John M. W. Whiting wrote chapters on cross-cultural methodology for the first and second editions, respectively, of the *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Coverage was limited to the use of ethnographies or the data collection efforts of others, such as the Human Relations Area Files. The term "cross-cultural methods," then, came to have an anthropological connotation for many social scientists. In 1967 and 1971, however, there were symposia at the meetings of the American Psychological Association that dealt with other problems in cross-cultural methodology, especially those involved in the gathering of new data. These included attitude measurement, experimentation, analyzing rival explanations for data, and translation. We prefer the broader connotation and so have written chapters for this book covering many types of problems that arise whenever a researcher wants to compare behavior across cultures. These include the use of anthropological data files, but since this topic is covered so well elsewhere (e.g., Naroll and Cohen, 1970) we have presented an introductory rather than a detailed treatment. Our more involved discussions are on psychological topics (e.g., the four symposia topics mentioned above, testing, and theory construction) for which there are few cross-cultural sources available for methodological guidance. We hope that the book will be useful to all social scientists, even though our treatments will undoubtedly reflect our training in psychology.

A few words about the development of the book may be of interest. R. B. attended the University of Guam as an undergraduate because of his father's job assignment. He became interested in cross-cultural problems since he was a minority group member at the school among his Guamanian, Micronesian, and Filipino classmates. He went to the "mainland" for graduate school, but came back to do his dissertation on translation since University of Guam students speak and write English and one of ten other languages. W. L. essentially completed graduate school in Europe. He became so intrigued by cross-cultural research while at the University of Minnesota that he decided to immerse himself

in it via cross-cultural topics and problems and ultimately a dissertation. R. B. and W. L. met in early 1970 and decided to join their efforts in writing a book designed to cover a wide range of methodological guidelines and topics for cross-cultural studies. They concur that a book like this could not be found during their dissertation projects, and that such a treatment of methodological issues would have been of considerable value.

During the very early stages of book preparation we asked a specialist, Robert M. Thorndike, to write two chapters on multivariate techniques. These would be aimed at an audience not wanting explanations in terms of matrix algebra and not wanting complex derivations. He confirmed that there were few clear, intuitive, non-mathematical treatments available, and so he agreed to write on factor analysis and other multivariate techniques. He did a great deal of special reading so as to make specific recommendations for cross-cultural research. We feel that he did an excellent job and are pleased to list his name on the title page.

Some of the ideas in Chapter 2 were developed during the summer of 1968. R. B. traveled to Northwestern University to work as a research assistant with Donald T. Campbell. One product was a paper on translation, jointly prepared by Campbell, R. B., V. Mary Stewart, and Oswald Werner. The paper has been circulated informally under the title, "Back-translation and other translation techniques for cross-cultural research." The involved schedules of the four authors have prevented a final published version. We would like to acknowledge the excellent work of Campbell, Stewart, and Werner, but remind the reader that interpretations in the present Chapter 2 are our responsibility.

The book is organized in two parts. Part One contains seven chapters dealing with substantive issues such as translation, experimentation, survey methods, and the use of psychological tests. This section covers methodological and problematic issues that one would encounter in most cross-cultural research. Part Two contains more technical material. Those persons contemplating the use of specific psychological tests or multivariate statistics would want to consult this section. The use of Part Two implies an understanding of Part One, and not vice versa.

Any book covering a wide range of topics such as this one does requires a great deal of library research, typing of readable drafts, and occasional advice from scholars regarding specific issues. Dennis Krueger was helpful in the early stages of library research, especially in tracking down obscure material. We wish to thank Mrs. Ann Drake of Western Washington State College's Bureau for Faculty Research, our chief typist, and Mrs. Jane Clark of the same office for their prompt and expert typing. Dean Herbert C. Taylor, Jr., of the Bureau for Faculty Research, kindly made many hours of Mrs. Drake's and Mrs. Clark's precious time available to us, and provided us with financial assistance. Thanks are also due Miss Candy Knaus of the Department of Psychology, Western Washington State College, for typing various sections of the manuscript. Special

thanks go to Ann Brislin, who happily and courageously accepted the dubious distinction of being an unpaid research assistant. One of her numerous jobs was organizing and checking the accuracy of our extensive bibliography. A number of psychologists who are top cross-cultural methodologists were kind enough to honor our requests to read small sections of the manuscript, and their comments were always helpful and illuminating. They included Raoul Naroll, Harrison Gough, Leonard Doob, Harry Triandis, and George Guthrie. John W. Berry, Gustav Jahoda, and Philip E. Vernon were able to send us copies of hard-to-find material, and John L. M. Dawson made portions of his manuscripts, simultaneously being prepared, available to us. Lee J. Cronbach kindly sent advance copies of papers which were read at a 1971 conference on mental testing held in Istanbul, Turkey. Our greatest thanks, however, go to hundreds of cross-cultural researchers whose often innovative and pioneering work we have been privileged to review. Without these precedents as guidelines, a book on cross-cultural research methods would be shallow indeed. Of course, we take full responsibility for the use we have made of all the comments and material we received. R. B. finished his sections of the manuscript while a fellow, then a permanent staff member of the East-West Center, Culture Learning Institute. He would like to thank his colleagues for the encouragement and support that they so generously gave.

We wish to give special thanks to our chief reviewers, John Turner and Robert Holt, for their helpful comments. Finally, we are indebted to our editor, Gardner Spungin.

Richard W. Brislin
Walter J. Lonner

June 1972

Contents

PART ONE
Substantive Issues

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Cross-cultural research has attracted a growing number of social scientists who are fascinated both by its advantages and disadvantages. The field itself is generally concerned with behavior as conditioned by living in a given country, culture, or environment, and its specific objective is to make comparisons of behavior between cultures. Of course, "making comparisons" implies that the underlying reasons for similarities and differences are sought. The advantages and disadvantages of cross-cultural psychology may become clear with this example. A certain psychologist is interested in the effects of parental child-rearing practices on the personalities of the children. Since he does research in his own culture, however, he may find that the range of parental behaviors available for study is limited. At this point he may look at *other* cultures that have more or less extreme practices (e.g., swaddling, severe independence training, and total nurturance by parents and other culture members). By studying these cultures he increases the range of his independent variable of interest, child-rearing practices, and its effects on his dependent variable of interest, the children's personalities. The researcher can then test hypotheses developed in his own country (e.g., greater levels of parental nurturance lead to corresponding levels of dependence), and/or modify his hypotheses to incorporate the new data. This procedure of starting in his own country and then gathering data in others increases the predictive range of the hypotheses and accounts for behavior in several cultures rather than just the researcher's own (Whiting, 1968).

If the procedure were as easy as that sketched above, there would be a vast number of cross-cultural studies. The problem however, is in planning and carrying out the investigation, that is, in the cross-cultural methodology. Assume that the researcher discovers that a certain culture-group in central Africa employs the "key" child-rearing practice for his theory. He has to face these and other problems in gathering and interpreting the necessary data:

1. gaining access to the culture;
2. obtaining samples of people equivalent to respondents from comparison studies in the researcher's own culture;
3. writing meaningful questions and translating them;
4. ascertaining that the questions written in one language are equivalent in meaning to those in another;
5. assuring that any additional tools of research (tests, equipment) are not merely a momentary and strange imposition on subjects;
6. interviewing people who may be much more hostile or courteous (both leading to biases) to researchers than respondents from Western countries;
7. developing reasons for the obtained data that are a function of all cultures under study rather than the researcher's own unicultural biases.

These are the challenges of cross-cultural psychology, and they have attracted behavioral scientists interested in solving them. Possible solutions to these and other problems constitute the largest portion of this book. Before dealing with them, however, we will attempt to explain in more detail what cross-cultural psychology is. A formal and widely accepted definition of "cross-cultural psychology" is not yet available, but we hope to *explain* what the term means in four ways:

1. by attempting a working definition which will undoubtedly be modified in the future;
2. by looking at four types of research which have been called "cross-cultural research";
3. by examining what a researcher can gain by engaging in cross-cultural research;
4. by content-analyzing 200 articles that have been submitted to the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*.

A Working Definition of Cross-Cultural Psychology

In the minds of most social scientists, the term "cross-cultural psychology" is associated with the comparison of behavior between members of different cultural groups. The terms "culture" or "cultural groups" are very difficult to define. Choice of a definition is made more difficult because of sheer numbers; well over 150 definitions of culture have been reviewed by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952). There is some communality among definitions, however, and the reviewers found that the following "central idea is now formulated by most scientists. . .":

"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of

culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 180).

Kroeber and Kluckhohn also speculate as to how this definition may change.

"The main respects in which, we suspect, the formula will be modified and enlarged in the future are as regards (1) the interrelations of cultural forms; and (2) variability and the individual" (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 180).

If this speculation proves correct, psychology should make major contributions to cultural studies since the discipline is centrally concerned with the individual as a unit of analysis.

After reviewing a good number of cross-cultural studies in psychology, we are able to suggest a working definition which can be modified in the future: Cross-cultural psychology is the empirical study of members of various culture (as defined above) groups who have had different experiences that lead to predictable and significant differences in behavior. In the majority of such studies, the groups under study speak different languages and are governed by different political units.

Types of Cross-Cultural Studies

The nature of cross-cultural psychology can be pinpointed even more by examining the types of studies that have been undertaken. This presentation closely follows the criteria suggested by Triandis (1969) to answer the question, "What makes a study cross-cultural?"

Certain studies have used concepts and theories developed in Western countries (most often the United States and European nations) and have investigated them in non-Western countries. These concepts include those from Piaget's developmental stages, Freudian positions, and Murray's needs. The investigations are often concerned with the antecedents and consequences of the behavior associated with the theories. The question is: Can behavior in non-Western cultures be predicted from these theories? The results will often indicate limits and shortcomings which, in turn, may lead to a better, more comprehensive theory. Chapter 6 covers several theories that have been investigated cross-culturally.

Other studies involve replication of Western-based experiments in other cultures, often with modifications to solve potential procedural difficulties. For instance, Western-based experimental studies of leadership, stereotyping, perception, learning, and conformity have been replicated in other cultures. Studies in this category differ from those in (1) above in that the theoretical position underlying the research is not as well developed. Chapter 2 on cross-cultural