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CROSS-CULTURE ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural experimental research is a methodological tool to reveal differences between cultures and identify cause-and-effect relationships. Any consideration of research designs starts with the development of cultural competence. When constructing an experiment, cultures of interest have to be considered and independent and dependent variables have to be adapted to ensure methodological equivalence. Before collecting data, sampling strategies and ethical considerations have to be taken into account. When interpreting cross-cultural findings, the researcher has to adjust for culture-specific response biases and consider adequate statistical measures. To help identify underlying cultural variables, specific methods like unpackaging, cultural priming, or situation sampling can be applied. Optimally, cross-cultural differences are captured in multiple studies using divergent methods.

Keywords: cross-cultural experiments; methodological equivalence; back translation; sampling; response bias; unpackaging; cultural priming; situation sampling.

Cross-cultural adaptation, also known as intercultural adaptation, is a topic that is frequently discussed in the field of intercultural communication. In this article, we will explore the concept of cross-cultural adaptation and its significance in today's globalized world. Cross-cultural adaptation refers to the process of individuals or groups adjusting to a new cultural environment different from their own. This process involves learning and adapting to the customs, values, beliefs, and behaviors of the host culture in order to effectively interact and function within that cultural context.

The importance of cross-cultural adaptation is evident in various aspects of life, including international travel, immigration, study abroad programs, and international business. When individuals encounter a new culture, they often experience a range of emotions and challenges as they navigate unfamiliar customs and norms.

The process of cross-cultural adaptation typically involves several stages. Initially, individuals may experience what is known as the "honeymoon" stage, characterized by excitement and fascination with the new culture. However, this is often followed by a period of "culture shock," where individuals may feel disoriented, frustrated, and anxious due to the differences they encounter. With time and experience, individuals enter a stage of adjustment, where they gradually become more

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familiar with the new culture and develop strategies to cope with challenges. Ultimately, the goal is to reach a state of adaptation, where individuals have integrated into the new culture to a significant degree and can function effectively within it.

Successful cross-cultural adaptation requires open-mindedness, cultural sensitivity, and effective communication skills. It involves developing cultural intelligence, which includes knowledge of cultural norms, awareness of one's own cultural biases, and the ability to adapt one's behavior and communication style to fit the cultural context. Organizations and educational institutions play a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation. They can provide cultural orientation programs, language training, and support networks to help individuals navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture. Additionally, individuals can seek out intercultural experiences, engage in dialogue with people from different cultures, and actively learn about and appreciate diversity.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cross-cultural experimental research is a powerful methodological tool to reveal differences between cultures. Since, using this method, cause-and-effect relationships can be identified it is often preferable to survey research. Experimental research involves the manipulation of an independent variable holding all other influences constant. If the manipulation changes the values of a dependent variable, it can be concluded that the manipulation “caused” the outcome. In cross-cultural studies, one important independent variable, culture, cannot be manipulated. Lacking the elements of random assignment to a condition and similarity of background conditions, cross-cultural studies are quasi-experimental designs. These designs limit internal validity (i.e., the confidence to draw conclusions about cause and effects) as changes in the dependent variable are potentially caused by factors other than the independent variable.

Cross-cultural experimental research starts with the identification of a research question and the development of hypotheses. As in monocultural research, any consideration of research designs begins with a comprehensive knowledge of research literature to learn how the field can be advanced. To avoid misconstruing cultural factors, it is moreover important to develop extensive and sophisticated knowledge about the cultures that are studied. On the one hand, one must be familiar with all aspects of a society (e.g., language, religion, values, history). Thereby, researchers have to be aware not to equate country and culture. Within each country, several “micro-cultures” or subcultures exist. In China, for example, there are over 50 different ethnic groups that differ in important dimensions. On the other hand, one needs to recognize own biases. Cultural factors might be misconstrued if the researcher generalizes own experiences to the people that are studied (e.g., the use of an American-centered model of psychological processes; Keith, 2011). Cultural

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competence can be developed by reading existing texts and ethnographies (i.e., descriptions of cultures that are derived from extensive observation and interaction by anthropologists). However, it should be noted that also those texts might be filtered through the authors' own set of biases. Other approaches to obtain cultural competence are to collaborate with researchers who are from the studied culture or to explore the cultures firsthand. The optimal way to learn about cultures is a combination of strategies (Heine, 2012).

As a next step, researchers construct an experimental design that includes all elements of the hypotheses. The decision about which cultures to study should be based on the interested theoretical variable. If, for example, the interested theoretical variable is collectivism, the chosen cultures should clearly differ in terms of their collectivism (Heine, 2012). Correspondingly, the vast majority of cross-cultural research chooses cultures to be investigated according to the specific research goal. Before making decisions, it should be noted that the more dissimilar cultures are, the more likely cross-cultural differences will be observed; however, the more dissimilar cultures are, the more likely these differences are to be influenced by uncontrolled variables. The best way to study cross-cultural differences is to compare more than two cultures. If only two cultures are studied, the researcher cannot gain knowledge about the size of differences. A difference between two cultures, for example, might seem large, although it is possibly smaller than the difference between those two and a third culture (Matsumoto & van de Vijver, 2011).

Researchers often use controlled and calibrated stimuli for independent variables. These, however, can be artificial and meaningless depending on the culture. The methods that are used in cross-cultural research should be perceived in ways as similar as possible across the different cultures to provide adequate construct validity (i.e., the confidence that the operationally defined variable captures the essence of the hypothetical construct). Thus, the cross-cultural researcher has to monitor the degree to which the methodology is equivalent across cultures (i.e., methodological equivalence). If the participants of different cultures are not comparably familiar with the procedure, the methods have to be adapted to be understandable in each culture (Heine, 2012). Adapting instruments involve conceptual, cultural, linguistic, and measurement features. Conceptual features aim at accommodating differences in indicators of concepts and theories (e.g., the names of well-known persons in a country as indicator of intelligence). Cultural features refer to accommodating cultural characteristics and cultural differences in norms, values, and practices (e.g., scripts for birthday events). Linguistic features reflect accommodating structural differences between languages and conventions in language usage (e.g., level of directness of requests by experimenters). Measurement features address differential familiarity with procedures for specific stimuli (e.g., pictures in a pictorial test; Matsumoto & van de

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Vijver, 2011). These adaptations can sometimes result in slightly different procedures in each culture by which some experimental control can get lost. Due to the challenges in creating methodological equivalence, most cross-cultural research has been conducted in societies that share many similar experiences and, importantly, an implicit understanding of experimental research: North American vs. East Asian students. This, however, can result in problems with both generalizability and power as cultural differences might be more difficult to detect in more similar samples. On the other hand, comparisons between students from industrialized societies can be considered as rather conservative (Heine, 2012).

Cross-cultural studies appear more frequently than ever before as culture has been shown to be an important variable in psychological processes. In trying to understand the psychology not only of people from one but from different cultures, research difficulties are multiplied. Moreover, cross-cultural researchers have to face a variety of special difficulties that go beyond monocultural studies from issues concerning measurement equivalence to translation. Furthermore, cross-cultural research is moving forward: The initial stage of simply finding different effects in different cultures has shifted to explaining cross-cultural differences by the use of methods like unpackaging or cultural priming. One of the major challenges today is to isolate sources of cross-cultural differences and identify cultural ingredients. The attention to cross-cultural research is relatively new in psychology why its methods have to be under critical surveillance and continuously developed.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic and complex process that individuals go through when encountering a new culture. It involves adjusting one's behavior, attitudes, and expectations to fit the host culture. By cultivating cultural intelligence and embracing diversity, individuals can enhance their intercultural competence and thrive in multicultural environments.

Underpinning the cross-cultural adaptation process are the two interrelated experiences of deculturation of some of the original cultural habits, on the one hand, and acculturation of new ones, on the other. The cumulative outcome of the acculturation and deculturation experiences is an internal transformation in the direction of assimilation into the mainstream culture. Long-term residents and immigrants are also likely to undergo an identity transformation, a subtle and largely unconscious shift from a largely monocultural to an increasingly intercultural self-other orientation, in which conventional, ascription-based cultural categories diminish in relevance while individuality and common humanity play an increasingly significant role in one’s daily existence. Central to this adaptation process are one’s ability to communicate in accordance to the norms and practices of the host culture and

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continuous and active engagement in the interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host society.

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