



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel



On the relationship between acculturation and intercultural understanding: Insight from the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test



R. Thora Bjornsdottir*, Nicholas O. Rule

University of Toronto, Psychology Department, Sidney Smith Hall, 4th Floor, 100 St George St, Toronto, ON M5S 3G3, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 April 2015

Received in revised form 1 February 2016

Accepted 15 March 2016

Available online 25 March 2016

Keywords:

Acculturation

Theory of mind

Person perception

ABSTRACT

Previous research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of culture and cultural identification to interpersonal understanding. We aimed to apply the ideas from this domain to mental state reasoning, or theory of mind. We thus investigated the relationship between acculturation and inferring the mental states of other people within and across cultures by measuring Caucasian and East Asian participants' accuracy in inferring the mental states of own- and other-ethnicity targets using the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test. As expected, Caucasian participants showed a significant ingroup advantage in inferring the mental states of own- versus other-ethnicity targets but no variation according to measures of acculturation. More important, East Asian residents of Canada showed greater accuracy for own- versus other-ethnicity targets—and their accuracy for Caucasian targets increased as a function of (i) the time they had lived in Canada, (ii) their experience interacting with Caucasians, (iii) increased endorsement of mainstream Canadian values, and (iv) decreased endorsement of their heritage culture's values. These results suggest that cross-cultural understanding may be malleable to acculturation and cultural experience, highlighting the importance of further research on how people from different cultural perspectives come to understand each other and subsequently ameliorate cross-cultural misunderstanding.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Many differences exist between cultures, often making communication across cultural lines difficult. This difficulty extends beyond linguistic barriers—differences in the way we perceive and think about others also contribute to misunderstandings and miscommunications. For example, the expression and recognition of emotions is essential to effective interpersonal communication. Although the expression of some emotions is universal (see Ekman & Oster, 1979; Matsumoto, Keltner, Shiota, Frank, & O'Sullivan, 2008), emotional expression and recognition is also affected by culture: facial expressions of emotion can vary across cultures, with notable differences between Western and Eastern expressions (e.g., Jack, Garrod, Yu, Caldara, & Schyns, 2012; see also Matsumoto, 2001, for a discussion of the universality vs. cultural specificity of emotional expression). Additionally, evidence suggests an ingroup advantage in emotion recognition, such that people more accurately identify the emotions from members of their own culture than from members of other cultures (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Paulmann & Uskul, 2014).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: thora.bjornsdottir@mail.utoronto.ca (R.T. Bjornsdottir).

Similar to emotion recognition, inferring the mental states of others (also called “theory of mind”—for an overview, see Baron-Cohen, 1995) critically affects interpersonal interactions. Mental state reasoning overlaps with empathy and involves the inference and extrapolation of others’ intentions and feelings, which is integral for interlocutors to effectively communicate (e.g., Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001). The eyes play a particularly important role in mental state reasoning, communicating a wealth of information and automatically drawing perceivers’ attention (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, & Jolliffe, 1997; Janik, Wellens, Goldberg, & Dell’Osso, 1978; Rule, Ambady, Adams, & Macrae, 2008; Vinette, Gosselin, & Schyns, 2004). In fact, perceivers can reliably infer others’ complex mental states when viewing the eye region of a face just as well as when presented with an entire face (Baron-Cohen et al., 1997). One of the most widely used measures of theory of mind, the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test (RME; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001), thus asks participants to identify individuals’ mental states from images of their eyes and successfully differentiates people with normally developed cognitive abilities from individuals who lack theory of mind (e.g., those with Asperger Syndrome; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001).

As mental state reasoning comprises an essential component of communication, and intercultural dialogue has grown increasingly frequent in the globalized world, understanding how culture affects the inferences that people make about others’ thoughts is critical. Adams et al. (2010) conducted the first investigation of culture’s influence on mental state inferences. Using a modified version of the RME that includes both Caucasian and East Asian targets, Adams et al. found that Japanese and (Caucasian) American participants more accurately identified the mental states of targets from their own culture. This demonstrated a distinct intracultural advantage in inferring others’ mental states and illuminated culture’s role in tuning mental state reasoning abilities. This own-culture advantage can be attributed to factors such as subtle cultural variation in nonverbal cues (see Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003). Furthermore, own-ethnicity faces tend to be processed more deeply (Levin, 1996), and perceivers attend preferentially to the eyes of ingroup members (Kawakami et al., 2014), which should advantage mental state reading. What, then, of people who find themselves between cultures? Specifically, how might a perceiver who grew up in one culture, but currently lives in another, perform when inferring the mental states of people from either culture? Here, research on acculturation points to a possible answer.

Previous work has found that acculturation affects individuals in diverse ways, including changes to their attributions, self-esteem, beliefs, and attitudes (e.g., Flaskerud & Uman, 1996; Ho, 2014; Zadeh, Geva, & Rogers, 2008). Additionally, much research demonstrates that immigrants more acculturated to their host culture change to accommodate it in a variety of ways. For example, Güngör et al. (2013) found that Japanese-Americans became more typically American and less typically Japanese in their personality (e.g., scoring lower on neuroticism) as they increasingly experienced and endorsed American culture. Similarly, Peng, Zebrowitz, and Lee (1993) reported that Koreans living in the U.S. judged characteristics of voices more like Americans than like Koreans living in Korea, demonstrating cultural adaptation in speech perception. Furthermore, Hedden, Ketay, Aron, Markus, and Gabrieli (2008) found that the difference between East Asians’ and Americans’ brain responses during the line judgment task (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003) decreased as East Asian participants acculturated to the U.S., suggesting that cultural differences in perception diminished with acculturation. Most relevant to the present work, Elfenbein and Ambady (2003) found that cultural differences in facial emotion recognition changed with cultural exposure such that immigrants with more exposure to their host culture came to better recognize the emotional expressions of people from the host culture. It therefore seems plausible that acculturation—or, indeed, perhaps even mere cultural experience or exposure—might also affect mental state inferences.

Expanding understanding of acculturation by examining its effects on mental state reasoning carries particular value, as inferring others’ states of mind can critically impact cross-cultural communication; that is, without accurately understanding other people’s mental states, effective communication simply cannot take place. In places with immigrant populations, cross-cultural communication may therefore be important, salient, and difficult. Investigating the effect of acculturation could help to ease this difficulty, making communication more effective.

To better understand how cultural adaptation affects intercultural understanding, we expanded upon Adams et al.’s (2010) findings to explore whether acculturation moderates the own-culture advantage in mental state reasoning. Based on the research reviewed above, we anticipated that acculturation would improve people’s ability to accurately infer the mental states of others across cultural lines. Specifically, we hypothesized that East Asian participants residing in Canada who report a stronger affiliation with Canadian culture and less identification with their heritage culture would more accurately infer the mental states of Caucasian targets compared to those reporting weaker affiliations with Canadian culture and stronger heritage culture identification. Thus, we expected that East Asian participants would infer the mental states of Caucasian targets better as a function of their acculturation to Canada.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

A total of 239 (99 Caucasian, 140 East Asian) undergraduates participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit or monetary compensation. The East Asian participants’ heritage cultures were 72.9% Chinese, 6.4% Filipino, 6.4% Korean, 5.7% Vietnamese, and 8.6% “other.”¹ Participants began by completing the cross-cultural version of the RME created

¹ We did not record the heritage cultures of the Caucasian participants in this study.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946941>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946941>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)