

Rethinking the Acculturation Model: Implications for Theory and Research

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ABSTRACT

Over the past five decades, extensive research has generated a multitude of theories, approaches, models, and principles in the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Within this field, various avenues of investigation have emerged, including the acculturation model, the monitor model, accommodation theory, the universal hypothesis, discourse theory, neurofunctional theory and the variable competence model. Among these, Schumann's acculturation model and its subsequent revisions stand out, yet they have not provided a framework for systematically assessing the accuracy of the propositions derived from the model. This paper seeks to undertake a comprehensive review, assessment, and critique of the acculturation model's validity, with the goal of examining the accuracy of the statements derived from it.

Keywords: Acculturation Model, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

INTRODUCTION

The acculturation theory, which has its origin in Linton's (1960, cited in Daniels, 2000) study on the native American population, was subsequently developed by Schumann (1978a), McLaughlin (1987) and Daniels (2000). The study identified an urge in the Native Americans to minimize the social and the psychological distance between them and the mainstream Americans by adapting to the dominant culture. In brief, the study was on how a dominant culture shapes and influences the fundamentals of the culture of the minorities. In other words, how the cultural minorities adapt to the dominant culture socially and psychologically for a better living.

As people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact more frequently, understanding acculturation becomes essential for effective communication. There is a growing number of individuals learning English as a second language in various contexts that include migration, international business, and online communication. The Acculturation Model needs to adapt to these changing demographics to ensure it remains relevant and effective. Traditional language learning methods are being complemented or replaced by multimodal approaches that incorporate various resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive online platforms. The Acculturation Model needs to account for these diverse learning environments. Acculturation Model is yet to contribute to the development of pedagogical approaches that respect and embrace cultural diversity. Acculturation is not only a linguistic process but also a psychological and sociocultural one. Reassessing the model can help educators understand the psychological and societal impacts of acculturation on learners, facilitating a holistic approach to language teaching and learning.

Researchers (e.g. Filhon, 2017; Schmid & Yilmaz, 2018) found good connection between a second language acquisition process of the speakers of different languages and the dominance of that particular language and related culture. The most recognized theory in this context is the Acculturation Model, which was introduced by John Schumann in 1978. This theory aims to explain how individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds, often including immigrants, migrant workers, or their descendants, acquire a second language (Zaker, 2016). This concept gained prominence through Schumann's examination of six individuals who were not native English speakers. Among these participants, one of them, named Alberto, stood out due to his limited advancement in acquiring the English language, distinguishing him from the progress made by the other five participants. Alberto was 33 years of age. He was a Costa Rican who worked for a factory where many non-native speakers of English also worked. Alberto lived in Portuguese speaking neighborhood. So, he didn't have much contact with the native speakers of English. He was not quite successful in learning English. Alberto's speech revealed a few characteristics of pidgin languages such as the lack of inflectional morphology. Schumann explained this failure in learning by focusing on Alberto's social and psychological distance from the native speakers of the target language i.e. English (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

THE CORE CONCEPT OF ACCULTURATION

The concept of acculturation, the study of social and cultural changes, dates back to the late 19th century. Redfield et al. (1936) point out that acculturation is a socio-cultural change which takes place when groups of people having different socio-cultural patterns come into direct contact and live very closely together. The change can occur in either side or even in both sides. The change

is not like erasing the original pattern thoroughly; rather it is like a kind of mixture or an exchange of culture embraced, to some extent, by the members of two or more cultural communities as they adapt to each other's original culture (Berry, 1997). Societal change in culture that results from modern and innovative ideas is not acculturation as Castro (2003) thinks. Although initially acculturation was considered to be unidimensional (Schwartz, et. al., 2010), it is now theorized as a multidimensional and complex phenomenon (Tanenbaum, et. al., 2013).

French language researchers (e.g. Lomicka, 2009; Roux et al., 2020) noted almost a similar concept known as 'intercultural'. In this process, culturally distinct groups of people interact with one another. 'Intercultural' is evidently identical with acculturation. However, the process of 'intercultural' is shown to be more likely to form new cultures than acculturation is (Berry, 1997). This article confines itself within the term of acculturation to refer to the social and psychological outcomes in an intercultural context.

THE ACCULTURATION MODEL

Brown (1994) presents a definition for the process of acculturation, portraying it as the adjustment to a new culture. This entails a shift in thinking and emotions for individuals learning a second language (L2). According to Brown, the relationship between culture and human society is mutual, influencing one another. The significance of the acculturation process becomes more pronounced when language becomes a focal point. This process of acquiring language occurs within the natural context of a dominant language environment (Smokowski, 2017). The theory asserts a direct connection between acquiring an L2 and the process of acculturation. The success of learners is determined by their ability to align with the cultural aspects of the target language (VanPatten, 2010).

Schumann constructed the acculturation model on the foundation of two distinct factors: social and psychological. According to Schumann, these factors play a decisive role in how much an L2 learner adapts to or adopts traits from the target language (TL) culture. He also posits that these two factors respectively determine the degree of social distance and psychological distance experienced by an L2 learner during their engagement with the TL (Schumann, 1978a). Ellis (2008) elaborates on this, explaining that social distance pertains to the extent to which individual learners can identify with members of the TL group and consequently establish contact with them. Conversely, psychological distance gauges how comfortable individual learners are with their target-language learning tasks (Zaker, 2016).

Schumann (1978a, 1990) claims that acculturation is the major factor that influences SLA. He points out that a learner's success in SLA is determined by his or her socio-psychological closeness to the target language. The more attached s/he is to the TL culture socially and psychologically, the more successful s/he is in the target language acquisition. There is a positive correlation between learners' language acquisition and their degree of closeness to the target group. According to Schumann (1986), the integration of second language (L2) learners into the community of the target language (TL) is not a direct influence on SLA. Instead, it initiates a sequence of factors that ultimately lead to organic SLA. Schumann further explains that acculturation, as a distant catalyst, introduces the learner to individuals who speak the target language and engaging in verbal communication with these speakers, as a closer catalyst, triggers discussions and the use of suitable input. This subsequently acts as the immediate stimulant for language acquisition. Schumann (1978b) indicates that more than one group living

in contact together but having different languages results in social distance. According to him, social distance can be influenced by a number of factors, including social dominance, integration pattern, enclosure, cohesiveness and size, congruence, attitude, and intended length of residence.

Social dominance: Social dominance, a key factor that influences social distance, refers to the relative social status held by the group learning a second language (L2) compared to the target language group. When the group learning an L2 holds either a higher or lower social status than the target language group, the level of social interaction between these groups tends to be inadequate in contrast to situations where both groups share equal social standing. When both groups are nearly equal as far as their political, economic, cultural and technological status is concerned, social contact increases, social distance minimizes and the acquisition of the target language is enhanced.

Integration pattern: The integration pattern matters a lot in shortening the social distance. Assimilation and adaptation are two patterns of positive integration. Assimilation is the process of taking in and fully understanding TL culture. It is the most favorable condition for SLA. Adaptation is also helpful for SLA. Adaptation without assimilation might look odd from time to time. However, if a sense of reserved attitude prevails in the integration process, the L2 learning is hampered.

Enclosure: When two groups, second language learning (2LL) and target language (TL) groups, live in contact and share social institutions, hospitals, market places, prayer houses, workplaces etc., the condition for L2 acquisition is very favorable.

Cohesiveness and size: When the 2LL group is not very cohesive i.e. not united in terms of some basic fundamental thoughts, L2 acquisition is enhanced. 2LL group size also matters. According to Schumann's perspective, a smaller size of the 2LL group creates a favourable environment for the acquisition of an L2.

Congruence: When two groups share similarities, they are more likely to have a fruitful social contact that influences language acquisition.

Attitude: When the 2LL group views the TL group positively, the condition becomes very favourable for L2 acquisition.

Intended length of residence: When the 2LL group has to live with the TL group for a longer period of time, they become more interested in learning the target language.

Schumann (1978b) also identifies three factors (attitude, motivation, culture shock), mainly affective in nature, that influence psychological distance. Language attitude means speakers of different language or language variants hold various attitudes toward their native language or other languages. Although attitude is just a kind of psychological condition, it affects human language learning. The attitude for SL learning is the learners' overall feelings reflected in his/her learning tendency. Positive attitude helps learning SLA by raising the efficiency; but negative attitude hinders it.

Motivation serves as an internal driving force that propels individuals toward their objectives. According to Schumann (1978a), there exists a positive correlation between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and acculturation. As individuals acculturate more, they tend to experience greater success in language learning. Furthermore, as they actively engage in the acculturation process and witness positive outcomes, their motivation to learn the second

language (L2) intensifies. Consequently, this heightened motivation prompts them to persist in their language learning endeavors and make progress in mastering the L2.

Culture Shock is learners' disorientation as a result of culture differences. It is an obstacle for ESL learners. Learners from different regions are exposed to new cultural, social and intellectual experiences in a second language learning environment. When this new environment contradicts their beliefs, values and attitudes, it can lead to culture shock.

Learners' achievements or lack thereof are directly contingent on their proximity, both socially and psychologically, to the target language community (Trawinski, 2005). A language typically serves three primary roles: communicative, integrative, and expressive. The communicative role facilitates the exchange of information among individuals. The integrative role aids in establishing one's societal identity, while the expressive role enables the articulation of specific psychological needs. Pidgin languages generally fulfil the communication function exclusively. Their purpose is essentially to convey information. Since pidgins invariably function as secondary languages, the integrative and expressive functions remain fulfilled by the speaker's native languages. Consequently, the process of pidginization generates an interlanguage that is simplified in its external structure and reduced in its internal structure (Schumann, 1974).

Schumann (1978b) recognizes the identification with a community as the primary requirement for a second language acquisition in his acculturation model. Learners' social integration and psychological attachment with the target group are the main processes of acculturation. Brown (1980) talks about several stages of these processes such as euphoria, culture shock, anomie or cultural stress, full recovery or assimilation and adaptation. Euphoria represents the initial phase of learners' immersion in the host culture, characterized by excitement, enthusiasm, and optimism. Conversely, culture shock encapsulates a spectrum of negative emotions experienced by learners, ranging from irritability to hostility, and from anxiety to panic. This phase can be likened to a process of grief. On the other hand, anomie, or cultural stress, marks a gradual transition towards equilibrium and objectivity among learners. During this phase, learners begin to recognize both the positive and negative aspects of both their native and host cultures. This stage resembles an identity crisis, wherein learners struggle to identify with either culture, leading to a sense of detachment. Full recovery or assimilation entails learners' acceptance and adaptation to the new culture. At this stage, learners regain their self-confidence, overcoming the identity crisis. They embark on a journey of self-discovery and embrace a new version of themselves shaped by their experiences in the host culture.

Schuman (1978a) says that the early stages of SLA start off with a language like pidgin language. It is the social and psychological distance which determines whether the pidgin language will take the form of a standard version of the target language or not. The target language remains pidginized if the social and psychological distance is still big. John Holm (2000) defines a pidgin as a simplified form of language that incorporates elements from both the target language and the native language of learners. It emerges when groups of people with no shared language need a means of verbal communication, often for trade purposes. However, due to reasons such as lack of trust or limited interaction, no group learns the native language of another group for social purposes. This leads to the development of a reduced language to fulfill communication needs (Holm, 2000).

In acculturation model, Schumann considers the minimization of social and psychological distance as the major variables which influence successful SLA. Variables other than

acculturation are of minor role in influencing SLA. He proceeds to explain that educational establishments have the true ability to influence variables like teachers, methods, and learning materials. We are of the opinion that these factors hold relatively limited influence within the broader language learning context, such that regardless of the extent to which we modify them, our progress is unlikely to surpass current levels of achievement (Schumann, 1978b). Norton Pierce (1995) recognizes the importance of Schumann's model because it highlights the significance of continuous engagements between language learners and native speakers of the desired language. However, it disowns the negligence of the role of individuals in the learning process stated in the model.

Furthermore, Doughty and Long (2003) think that Schumann's model is fit for natural setting only. They distinguish acquisition from learning. They assume that conscious language learning ignores social and psychological variables. Hence, the Acculturation model is not capable of producing a method for learning a second or a foreign language. Finally, Schumann (1986) finds time as a major factor which can influence the whole process of acculturation dynamically. He thinks that the socio-psychological distance doesn't necessarily remain the same always. It can increase, it can decrease or even it can remain static in a particular context.

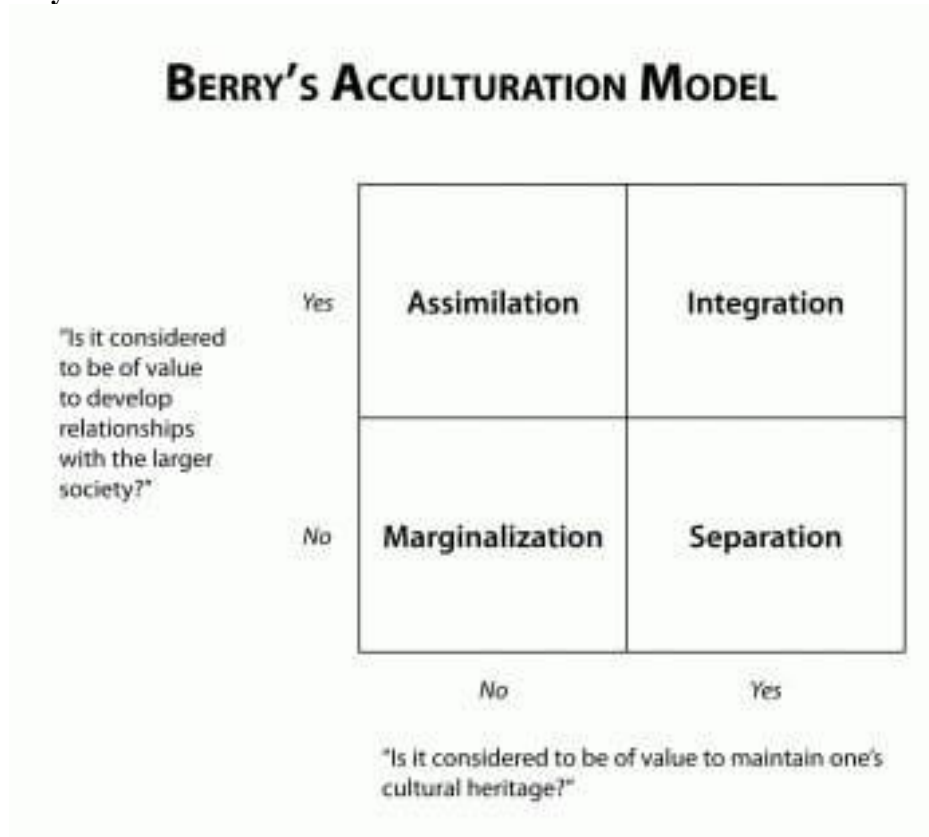
AN EXTENDED MODEL OF ACCULTURATION

The integration of additional variables into the acculturation model occurred through an examination of various cognitive models relevant to second language acquisition (SLA). This process involved evaluating McLaughlin's cognitive theory, as well as exploring the experiential approach proposed by Hatch and Hawkins, the knowledge and control dimensions model by Bialystok and Ryan, Anderson's framework of active thought control, and Gasser's connectionist lexical memory framework (Schumann, 1990). Anderson's cognitive dimension elaborates Schumann's model that talks about nativization and denativization (Larsen-Freeman, 2007). Ellis (2015) summarizes the process of 'nativization' as a kind of modification of L2 input in compliance with the learners' internalized knowledge of L1. Nativization, a form of assimilation, occurs in the early stage of SLA. On the flip side, denativization is a process involving adaptation. It is the modification of the learners' internalized knowledge of L1 for accommodating L2 input. Denativization occurs in the later stages of SLA.

Berry's Acculturation Model, often referred to as Berry's Fourfold Model, centers on intercultural dynamics. It comprises four distinct stages: Assimilation, in which individuals from a distinct culture adopt the cultural practices of the new country or region they've relocated to; Integration, involving the simultaneous embrace of both the dominant culture and one's original culture; Separation, when an individual eschews the dominant culture and retains their original cultural identity; Marginalization, wherein someone rejects both their native culture and the prevailing cultural norms (Cohen, 2011). This model emphasizes the importance of multicultural societies, minorities and individuals' choice in determining their degree of acculturation. However, this model does have major faults. While Berry's Acculturation Model provides a framework for understanding acculturation processes, it may oversimplify the complexities inherent in cultural adaptation. This assertion warrants further elaboration to clarify its significance. Specifically, it implies that the four distinct stages outlined in the model may not adequately capture the nuanced experiences and varied trajectories of individuals navigating intercultural dynamics. Furthermore, the model's delineation of clear-cut categories—assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization—may fail to fully encompass the

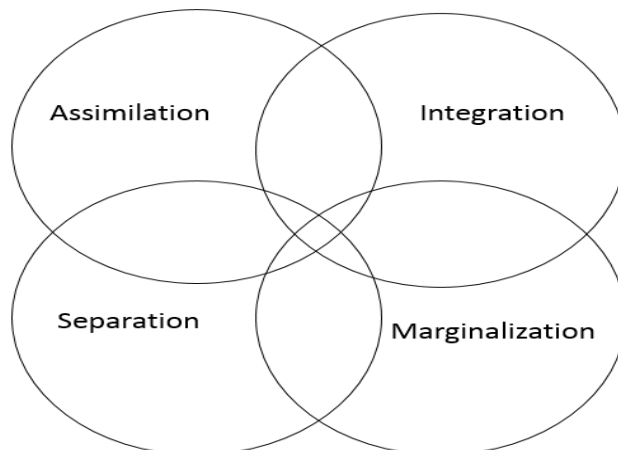
fluidity and ambiguity often encountered in real-life acculturation scenarios. Therefore, while Berry's Fourfold Model offers valuable insights into acculturation, it may benefit from refinement to better accommodate the multifaceted nature of cultural identity formation and adaptation. We can see it in a diagram.

Figure 1: Berry's Acculturation Model



In contradistinction to Berry's Acculturation Model, Cohen (2011) introduced an alternative framework to allow transition from one box to another:

Figure 2: Cohen's acculturation framework



Beiser et al. (1988, as cited in Berry, 1997) suggest that age and gender are influential factors in the acculturation process. They note that the transition tends to be smoother for young children, while acknowledging that females may face particular challenges compared to males. On the other hand, Berry (1997) posits that the period of adolescence poses difficulties for older youths in acculturating smoothly, attributing this to a potential discrepancy between parental and peer expectations. This conflict may be exacerbated, on a more general observation about adolescence, by the psychological and physical changes experienced by older youths. The extension of the acculturation model involves its application to meet the specific educational needs of ESL students, focusing on comprehending the social and cultural influences affecting students' lives. This includes designing curricula that acknowledge these realities (Buttaro, 2004). This approach demands a meaningful alignment of textbooks and teaching environments with language learning objectives. Menard-Warwick (2005) emphasizes the significance of integrating the target language into understanding and addressing social and personal matters. Sylvester (2002) also advocates for teachers to actively acquaint themselves with their students' identities beyond the classroom, and then leverage these identities in instructional activities to foster students' ongoing engagement in learning. Menard-Warwick's emphasis on integrating the target language into understanding and addressing social and personal matters highlights the importance of contextualizing language learning within meaningful and relevant experiences. This approach recognizes that language is not isolated from the broader social and cultural contexts in which it is used. By incorporating real-life situations, students can better comprehend and apply language skills to authentic communicative scenarios, making the learning process more engaging and practical.

Furthermore, Sylvester's advocacy for teachers to actively acquaint themselves with their students' identities goes beyond the conventional boundaries of the classroom. Recognizing and understanding the diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences of students is a foundational step towards creating an inclusive learning environment. This approach aligns with the principles of culturally responsive teaching, where educators leverage students' unique identities as valuable resources for enriching the learning process. By acknowledging students' identities beyond the classroom, teachers can tailor instructional activities to resonate with the cultural backgrounds and personal experiences of their learners. This personalized approach not only enhances students' sense of belonging but also promotes a deeper connection between the language being taught and the students' own lives. Language becomes a tool for expressing one's identity, thoughts, and emotions, fostering a more profound engagement in the language learning process. Incorporating students' identities into instructional activities is a powerful strategy for fostering ongoing engagement in learning. When learners see the relevance of language to their own lives, they are more likely to remain motivated and invested in the learning process. This approach aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of student-centered and culturally responsive pedagogies in promoting effective and meaningful learning experiences.

Menard-Warwick and Sylvester advocate for a holistic approach to language teaching that goes beyond the mere transmission of grammar and vocabulary. By integrating the target language into social and personal contexts and actively acknowledging students' identities, educators can create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment that enhances students' engagement and proficiency in the target language. This approach not only addresses the

cognitive aspects of language acquisition but also recognizes the socio-cultural dimensions that shape the language learning experience.

CRITICISM OF THE ACCULTURATION MODEL

The acculturation model serves as a conceptual framework that elucidates the comprehension of success or failure in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) across diverse contact situations. This theory endeavors to elucidate the connection between learners' acquisition of an L2 and their social and psychological attributes, thus highlighting the significance of social factors in the process. Despite being referenced and acknowledged in various research studies, the acculturation model has encountered criticism from several scholars.

The acculturation model has been widely criticized for being outdated and unreliable due to the limited empirical support and difficulty measuring the social variables, which Schumann claimed as an important factor in the acculturation model (Ellis, 2015). Freeman and Long (1991) point out that Schumann didn't specify the precise combinations and levels of social and psychological factors needed to predict language learning outcomes. Furthermore, the model falls short in explaining how the rate of acquisition is influenced by these social and psychological elements. It also lacks an account of the alteration of social or psychological distance over time. Most notably, it doesn't elucidate how a learner's current social and psychological proximity correlates with their proficiency during an L2 learning. Additionally, the model neglects to illustrate the variation of these social and psychological factors on an individual basis.

Saville-Troike (2006) argued that the model is problematic in that the concept of acculturation and what it entails is too complex to be operationally defined or experimentally tested. Stauble (1977) discovered no discernible correlation between acculturation and proficiency. Moreover, Schumann omitted significant personal factors such as age, family separation, prior educational experiences, or any traumatic encounters the learner might have had. These supplementary stress-inducing factors significantly influence a learner's performance in a novel social environment.

Acculturation model maintains that certain social and psychological variables cluster into a single variable called acculturation. This model is a complex idea when it is to be experimented. It accounts for several important aspects involved in SLA but it ignores other potential cognitive factors (e.g. cognitive and instructional factors) related with SLA (Farhady, 1981). Ellis (2008) criticizes it for having very limited empirical support. He also points out that social factors are more likely to have an indirect impact rather a direct one on SLA. He goes onto say that pidginization is not a fact or situation which can be observed from an individual point of view. Rather it is a group phenomenon. On the other hand, language acquisition is an individual phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

From a critical standpoint, this paper has delved into an examination of various studies surrounding the acculturation model, particularly its relevance in elucidating interactions between immigrants and the dominant culture. The analysis scrutinizes acculturation within the context of dominant-subordinate dynamics, the reciprocal evolution of immigrants and the host society, the formation and transformation of identities, and issues pertinent to equity and

fairness. This assessment serves as a call to action for educators, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to thoughtfully consider the implications of acculturation theories when making decisions linked to SLA. While the acculturation model indeed encompasses vital factors potentially involved in SLA, as it incorporates learners' social and psychological elements, there are challenges when applying these factors within an EFL classroom, based on our teaching experience. Firstly, educators might lack proper methods to teach L2 culture or possess insufficient knowledge for effective instruction. Secondly, incorporating these factors into student learning requires a context that mirrors real-life experiences more closely than what traditional classroom settings can offer. This observation highlights the need for innovative pedagogical approaches that can authentically engage learners in acculturation processes within educational environments. Additionally, it prompts consideration for the development of acculturation theories that align with principles of inclusivity and equity in language learning experiences.

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