

A New Framework for Conceptualizing Acculturation Dynamics in Japan

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The goal of this paper is to report on the development of a new framework for characterizing acculturation dynamics, their inherent acculturation strategy alignments, and their consequent acculturation outcomes. Prominent acculturation frameworks such as John Berry’s acculturation attitudes (Berry, 2008, 2013; Berry & Sabatier, 2010) and Bourhis et al.’s Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis & Barrette, 2003; Bourhis & Dayan, 2004; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997) have utility in addressing Japan-based acculturation, but diverging schema found among many subjects in Japan for constructing the meaning and outcomes of their acculturation processes necessitate more explicit, intentional treatment than Berry or Bourhis et al. provide.

The population in the study from which this framework was constructed consisted of Americans and Japanese working together in Japan-based offices in organizations owned by either Japanese or American entities. Twenty participants (7 Japanese and 13 Americans) were interviewed from one to two hours each. Whole text analysis and the constant comparative method were utilized to analyze the interview data and create profiles of subjects who perceived themselves involved in different types of acculturation dynamics and outcomes.

The acculturation framework proposed by the author addresses two key acculturation issues: 1. “When interacting with cultural outgroup coworkers, does the subject perceive these coworkers as categorizing him as culturally similar or different from themselves?” and 2. “Does the individual perceive herself as a core member of her work organization when interacting with cultural outgroup coworkers?” In other words, the first dimension examines the construction of national cultural group boundaries, while the second dimension treats the negotiation of or-

ganizational membership status. Considering these issues simultaneously results in four acculturation profiles:

Figure 1
American—Japanese acculturation profiles.

Are outgroup members perceived as assuming cultural similarity between themselves and the subject?	“Yes” (Similar)	Marginalized Outsider	Assimilated Member
	“No” (Different)	Alien	Integrated Member
		“No”	“Yes”

Does the subject perceive herself as a core organizational group member?

The response to the question on the vertical axis is not a matter of giving up one’s national identity; rather, the key point is whether the acculturator feels viewed by his cultural outgroup as someone who is—or potentially could become—a provisional group member who has functional mastery of the outgroup’s cultural and linguistic competencies. For example, did American subjects perceive that they were accepted by Japanese as competent and reliable in contexts requiring Japanese cultural and linguistic competence?

In assessing where a person belongs on the horizontal axis in Figure 1, it is of primary interest whether (in the subject’s perceptions) cultural outgroup members admit her as a core organizational member who can competently enact essential work-related roles such as participating in meetings with coworkers, serving customers, and participating in group projects and decision-making processes.

By juxtaposing these two dimensions, four basic acculturation profiles were generated: *Marginalized Outsider*, *Alien*, *Assimilated Member*, and *Integrated Member*. *Marginalized Outsiders* (in the top left cell in Figure 1) felt

unaccepted as core organizational members by their cultural outgroup, but also perceived that such coworkers assumed that s/he was similar enough to adhere to their cultural practices and to function in their language. *Aliens* believed that they were not accepted as core organizational members and also treated as fundamentally different by cultural outgroup coworkers. *Assimilated Members* felt not only like core organizational members but also treated as if they were culturally similar to the outgroup. *Integrated Members* perceived that they were viewed by ethnocultural outgroup coworkers as culturally different but also deeply accepted within the organization.

In future research, the author will elaborate the characteristics of each profile and attempt to develop an instrument to assess the two dimensions of the framework. This will allow for testing whether the framework has utility not only for describing acculturation dynamics in Japan, but also among populations in other national cultures.

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