

John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication 21:1*
© 2011. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way.

The author(s) of this article is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints, for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible to members (students and staff) only of the author's/s' institute, it is not permitted to post this PDF on the open internet.

For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

Please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website: www.benjamins.com

Tables of Contents, abstracts and guidelines are available at www.benjamins.com

Japanese sojourners' attitudes toward Americans

Exploring the influences of communication accommodation, linguistic competence, and relational solidarity in intergroup contact

Makiko Imamura, Yan Bing Zhang and Jake Harwood

Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas, USA /

Department of Communication Studies, University of Kansas, USA /

Department of Communication, University of Arizona, USA

Guided by the intergroup contact hypothesis, the authors examined the associations among Japanese sojourners' ($N=94$) perceived linguistic competence with English, communication accommodation of their most frequent American contact, relational solidarity with the contact, and their attitudes toward Americans as a cultural group. Results indicated that participants' linguistic competence with English and perceptions of Americans' communication accommodation positively predicted their relational solidarity with their most frequent American contact. In addition, relational solidarity mediated the relationships between both linguistic competence and communication accommodation and cognitive and behavioral attitudes. Results were discussed in light of communication accommodation theory, the contact hypothesis and prior literature in intergroup and intercultural communication.

Keywords: contact hypothesis, communication accommodation, Japanese sojourners, linguistic competence with English, intergroup attitudes

Intergroup communication research has gained attention since the 1990s due to a growing interest in understanding how contact with specific group members is associated with attitudes toward groups (Harwood, Giles, & Palomares, 2005). Although intergroup communication research has extended to include different ethnic, religious, or age groups (e.g., Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005; Islam & Hewstone, 1993), these groups typically exist within the same broader

cultural context, and fewer studies have given attention to cross-national contact (cf. Greenland & Brown, 1999). Communication is no longer restricted by national geographic boundaries due to advances in communication technology and transportation (Abrams & Hogg, 2004). The rapid acceleration of globalization in recent years has increased the opportunities for transnational encounters. Hence, further examination of the intergroup dynamics of such encounters is merited.

An increasing number of sojourners and immigrants are coming to the United States every year, many from East Asia. Educational institutions in the United States accepted over 81,000 students from China, 69,000 from Korea, and 33,000 from Japan in the academic year of 2007/08 (Institute of International Education, 2009). As the number of sojourners in the United States grows, examination of cross-national intergroup communication becomes more significant (e.g., Voci & Hewstone, 2003). The current study examines Japanese sojourners' intercultural communication experiences with Americans and their attitudes toward Americans as a whole. Our project extends previous research in three ways. First, we examine cross-national communication, an under-explored area of intergroup contact research. Second, we explore contact effects on a low-status group, whereas most previous research has focused on contact effects on higher status groups. Third, we detail a theoretical model suggesting that relational closeness mediates the effects of specific communication variables on intergroup attitudes. Relatively little intergroup contact research has dealt with the specific communication variables, or the interrelationships between specific forms of communication and the broader relationship context.

Intergroup contact theory in the cross-national context

Much research in intergroup relations is guided by the intergroup contact hypothesis. Allport (1954) suggested that direct contact between individuals from different social groups, particularly under certain conditions (e.g., equal status, institutional support, interdependent cooperation, and common goals) had the capacity to reduce intergroup biases (see also Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Harwood, 2010). The contact hypothesis postulates that ignorance, unfamiliarity, categorization, and competition promote stereotypes and negative perceptions of outgroups, whereas mutual knowledge, decategorization, and cooperation should reduce intergroup biases (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Miller, 1996). In the cross-national context, cultural groups are often characterized by distinct languages and dialects within a language. The English language, however, has achieved power and status as the world's lingua franca through globalization. In most intercultural encounters involving Westerners, English is expected to be the "correct" or official language to use. From the ethno-linguistic vitality perspective, native English

speakers automatically gain language-based power, status, and authority in intergroup encounters with non-Native English speakers (Giles & Johnson, 1987). Hence, English has the potential to bring people together or the power to divide people into high and low status groups.

In the case of intercultural encounters in the U.S. between Japanese sojourners and Americans, the Japanese sojourners are normatively expected to speak English with their American conversation partners. For those Japanese who have excellent command of English, intercultural encounters with Americans in general could be very rewarding and pleasant (Kim, 1991). For those Japanese whose English skills are inadequate, the pressure to make linguistic accommodations to the American partner might be overwhelming (Kim, 2002). In addition to the linguistic barrier, Japanese sojourners may not be fully aware of the normative behaviors in daily intercultural encounters with Americans. Unfamiliarity with the social norms is disadvantageous to Japanese sojourners staying in the U.S. because it prevents sojourners from functioning appropriately and effectively in their adaptation process or leads to negative perceptions of them as communicatively incompetent (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). As a result of all these factors, it is meaningful to examine whether contact effects persist, or whether the arrays of challenges to cross-national communication diminish the opportunities and effectiveness of contact. Clearly, Allport's (1954) contact conditions are not necessarily intrinsic to the contact situation, but rather aspects that are perceived and experienced by people in intergroup interaction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). From that regard, application of the contact hypothesis to cross-national intergroup communication becomes important to gain a better understanding of the factors that may inhibit the development of positive outcomes from intergroup contact.

A small amount of previous research has examined cross-national contact. Findings from previous research have demonstrated that both contact quality and frequency of contact with outgroup members enhance intergroup attitudes (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005a). Greenland and Brown's (1999) study with British and Japanese participants revealed that contact quality (e.g., voluntary, cooperative, and close) was positively associated with enhanced affective attitudes toward the outgroup as a whole. In a similar vein, Stephan, Diaz-Loving, and Duran's (2000) study with Mexicans and Americans in Mexico found that contact quality (e.g., voluntary, interpersonal categorization, equal status, and cooperation) was a significant positive predictor of attitudes toward outgroup members for both American and Mexican participants. In addition, recent research examining attitudes toward Muslims after the 9/11 indicates that American high school students who had Muslim friends were more positive about Muslims as a group than those who had no contact with Muslim individuals (Christian & Lapinski, 2003). Moreover, Eller and Abrams' (2004) study with British's contact with French in Britain and

Mexicans' contact with Americans in Mexico found that contact as friends was significantly associated with positive cognition of French and Americans respectively. It is notable that close relationships are considered critical to changing attitudes in recent years, although the majority of this line of work comes from contact between nations that are relatively geographically proximate and often nations that are somewhat similar in cultural norms and practices. Extending this line of research, this project examines the role played by close relationships in a cross-national context between Japanese and Americans and variations in closeness of those relationships as a predictor of intergroup attitudes.

Contact effects among low-status groups

Most contact research has focused on contact outcomes for members of majority or higher status groups with minimal attention devoted to members of minority or lower status groups. According to Tropp and Pettigrew's (2005b) meta-analysis, although the contact effect holds for both the majority and minority status groups, the effect is generally weaker for members of low status groups, perhaps because the contact experiences of members of minority/low status groups are often of lesser quality than those of majority group members (Greenland & Brown, 1999; Islam & Hewstone, 1993). Examining contact outcomes from the minority group's perspective is critical, because minority group members may perceive and define intergroup relations differently from the majority due to their lower status and more sensitivity to their group status (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005b). Specifically, members of minority status groups are more aware of their ethnic and linguistic differences from the majority status group (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) and their groups' disadvantaged status and lower position in the social hierarchy (Operario & Fiske, 2003). Brown (2000) argues that members of a lower status group are more likely to establish ingroup cohesion and solidarity than members of the majority status group. That said, ingroup cohesion among lower status group members may be a barrier to establishing rapport with members of the majority status group. Altogether, arguments on the status differences and the significant differences in the effects of contact for members of minority and majority status groups provide sufficient support to explore the contact effect from the perspective of a minority/lower status group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Hence, this paper examines contact outcomes of Japanese sojourners' communication experiences with Americans in the United States.

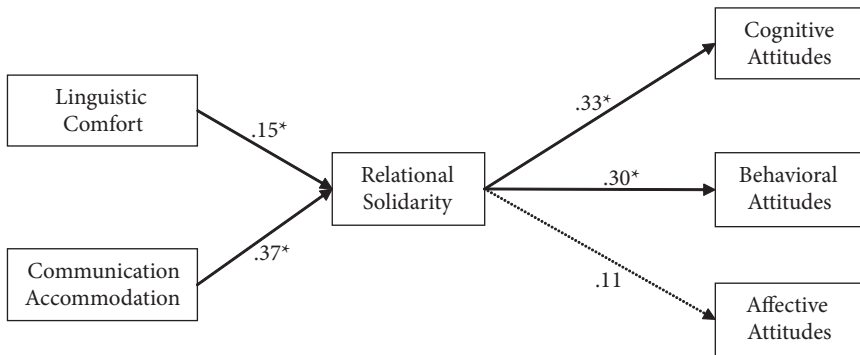


Figure 1. Model of relationships between linguistic and communication predictors, relational solidarity (mediator), and three dimensions of attitudes (outcomes). All individual mediated pathways are significant and meet Baron and Kenny's (1986) conditions for full mediation, except those involving affective attitudes (Goodman tests: linguistic competence to cognitive attitudes = 2.47, linguistic competence to behavioral attitudes = 2.46, communication accommodation to cognitive attitudes = 2.90, communication accommodation to behavioral attitudes = 2.15, all $ps < .05$).

* $p < .05$

Intercultural communication, relationships, and intergroup attitudes

The current study provides a more sophisticated analysis of contact quality than much previous research by examining specific communicative (i.e., participants' linguistic competence and partner's communication accommodation) and relational (i.e., relational solidarity) dimensions of contact. Specifically, we work from a model predicting that communicative variables are the core to the development of close personal relationships. As noted above, close personal relationships have been shown to be central to intergroup contact effects. Hence, in our model (see Figure 1 for a schematic), the relational variable mediates the effects of interpersonal communication dynamics on intergroup attitudes. Below, we discuss two specific communication variables that influence relational quality: communication accommodation and linguistic competence.

Communication accommodation. Communication accommodation theory (CAT; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) provides a theoretical framework for understanding interpersonal relationships in the intercultural communication context. CAT explains how people modify their communication based on what they perceive to be the cognitive, emotional, and conversational needs of their conversation partners and situational cues such as stereotypical views of their partners' group (Giles et al., 1991). Stereotype-based accommodation is insensitive to conversation partners' needs, hence it is perceived as inappropriate and dissatisfying

(Giles et al., 1991; Hummert, 1994; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). For example, Williams and Giles (1996) found that perceived communication accommodation was associated with satisfaction, whereas inappropriate accommodation was associated with dissatisfaction. In addition, highlighting the relationships between CAT and intergroup attitudes, Soliz and Harwood (2003) found that grandchildren's communication accommodation in conversations with grandparents was positively associated with attitudes toward older adults in general.

Giles et al. (1991) argue that "accommodation [...] can function to index and achieve solidarity with [...] a conversational partner reciprocally and dynamically" (p. 2). The nature of solidarity implies various relations connecting one person with another person. To a large extent, relational solidarity reflects relational satisfaction and closeness, liking, commonality, and trust (Harwood, 2000; Hendrick, 1988; Wheelless, 1978). Relational solidarity with specific group members, which can be built from appropriate communication accommodation in an intercultural context, has high potential to enhance intergroup relations. Highlighting the importance of communication in intergroup relations, recent studies have considered communication accommodation as a proxy or a communicative manifestation of contact quality to enhance attitudes toward outgroup members (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). In short, intergroup contact provides an opportunity to establish a closer relationship with group members (e.g., Pettigrew, 1997) and that relational intimacy can break down barriers between ingroup and outgroup members (Brislin, 1986). Consistently, Rose (1981) explains that cooperative interdependent relationships can promote favorability of outgroup members and lessen intergroup bias.

Linguistic competence. Language serves a central function to interpersonal relationships in the intercultural context, and yet it is also a primary barrier in most of the intercultural encounters due to the fact that interactants frequently do not share the same common language (Gareis, 1995; Kim, 2002). Communication competence, especially linguistic performance, influences sojourners' relational solidarity with host nationals and sociocultural adjustment, and thus cannot be separated from any interaction processes (Gareis, 1995). Specifically, Giles and Johnson (1987) argue that language (e.g., English) can be an important tool for maintaining cultural membership, identification, and relational solidarity. Unlike intergroup contact situations within the same culture (e.g., inter-ethnic communication and intergenerational communication) where a common language is shared, language activates intergroup cues in intercultural context and influences interpersonal relationship development and maintenance (e.g., Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Supporting this view, Kim (2002) argues that linguistic competence and comfort are vital components in interpersonal relationship development across cultures. When interactants are linguistically challenged, relationship develop-

ment becomes more difficult especially in American culture where verbal message exchange is highly valued (Kim, 2002). Supporting the argument, Kudo and Simkin's (2003) qualitative study with Japanese international students and Australian host nationals found that the perceived English proficiency of Japanese students influenced the quality of message exchange with the host nationals.

Taken together, one's own comfort in reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension determines sojourners' motivations for interaction with host nationals to a great extent. Being comfortable enough to carry on conversations is an indicator of perceived communication competence of one's self. Unlike general intercultural communication competence which involves appropriateness and effectiveness within the given context and situation, overall comfort with English is applicable to any situations. Hence, in the current study, Japanese sojourners' perceived linguistic comfort in communicating with their most frequent American contact was measured as an index of linguistic competence.

Considering the importance of solid interpersonal relationships with host nationals for Japanese sojourners and in line with the current literature, this study focuses on the functions of an individual level intervening variable that is associated with positive interpersonal relationships (i.e., relational solidarity). The following research hypotheses are proposed based on the basic tenets of the intergroup contact hypothesis (Pettigrew, 1986), the literature on intergroup attitudes, and communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1991).

H1: Japanese participants' linguistic competence with English will be a positive predictor of their perceptions of relational solidarity with their most frequent American contact.

H2: Japanese sojourners' perceived accommodation from their most frequent American contact will be a positive predictor of their perceptions of relational solidarity with that American individual.

H3: Japanese sojourners' perceptions of relational solidarity with their most frequent American contact will mediate the relationships between communication accommodation and linguistic competence and their cognitive, behavioral, and affective attitudes toward Americans.

Method

Participants

Ninety-seven Japanese participants were recruited from a medium-sized Midwestern university in the United States. Three subjects were removed from the sample due to extensive missing data. Among the participants included in this

study ($N = 94$; M age = 26.70, $SD = 6.50$, range = 19–46), 57 (i.e., 60.6%) were female. Participants had stayed in the United States for 2.98 years on average ($SD = 2.13$, range = 3 months — 8.58 years).

Participants were asked to identify and provide information about their most frequent American contact such as sex (46.6% females) and ethnicity (85.5% European Americans, 2.5% African Americans, 7.7% Asian Americans, and 4.3% other ethnicities). Participants also reported the types of relationships with their most frequent American contact and major language(s) used in interaction. The types of relationships included friendships (61.4%), acquaintances (25.9%), and romantic relationships (12.7%). Participants reported that English was used in all interactions, among which 93.94% of the time English was the only language used, and Japanese was used occasionally (i.e., 6.06% of the time) along with English. Participants indicated that Japanese was not dominant in any of the interactions.

Measures

Communication accommodation. Fifteen items were used to measure participants' perceptions of communication accommodation of the American individual with whom they had the most frequent contact on 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = .88$; $M = 5.43$, $SD = .91$). These items (i.e., this American person is overly direct, loud, controlling, rude, a good listener, self-centered, overly expressive, interruptive, and condescending in conversations with me, gives me unwanted advice, shows prejudice against me, uses exaggerating tones, respects me, stereotypes me as a foreigner who cannot speak English well, and his/her remarks in conversations with me are appropriate) were developed from two focus groups with international graduate students from China, Japan, and Korea. In the focus groups, the interviewees were asked to describe the characteristics of Americans' communication that they were happy or unhappy with, reflecting dimensions of accommodative and non-accommodative behaviors (Williams & Giles, 1996). Based on the interviews, the most common accommodative and non-accommodative communication behaviors of Americans experienced by the East Asian international students were generated. The negatively phrased items were recoded so that higher scores indicate more appropriate communication.

Linguistic competence with English. Participants indicated how comfortable they were using English in speaking, listening comprehension, reading, and writing on 7-point scales (1 = not comfortable at all and 7 = extremely comfortable). The Japanese participants' average comfort level with using English was moderate ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.28$; $\alpha = .90$).

Relational solidarity. Six items were used to measure relational solidarity ($\alpha = .73$; $M = 5.52$, $SD = .83$). Participants reported their perceptions of commonality, closeness, liking, trust, and satisfaction with the American individual with whom they had the most frequent contact (e.g., we are not very close at all; we feel very different about most things; in general, I am very satisfied with my relationship with this person) on 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The items were adapted from Wheelless' (1978) measurement of interpersonal solidarity and Hendrick's (1988) measurement of relationship satisfaction. Items that described negative perceptions of relational solidarity were recoded.

Cognitive attitude. Nine semantic differential items measured the cognitive dimension of attitudes about Americans ($\alpha = .77$; $M = 4.73$, $SD = .81$; e.g., intelligent-stupid, sincere-insincere) on 7-point scales. Items were adopted from Tropp and Pettigrew's (2005a) investigation of intergroup contact and affective and cognitive dimensions of prejudice. After recoding, higher scores indicate more positive perceptions.

Behavioral attitude. Eight items measured participants' behavioral attitude toward Americans ($\alpha = .86$; $M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.03$). Participants reported how much they were willing to engage in behaviors and activities if given opportunities (e.g., develop more than just speaking acquaintances with Americans; choose to marry an American) on 7-point scales (1 = not at all willing and 7 = extremely willing). Items were adopted from Cooke's (1978) attitudes scale and Tropp's (2003) investigation on the psychological impact of prejudice.

Affective attitude. To assess the general feelings toward Americans, participants indicated how warm they felt toward Americans on a thermometer scale ranging from 0° (cold or unfavorable) to 99° (warm or favorable) ($M = 67.24$, $SD = 17.03$). The thermometer scale has been used as an assessment of the affective intergroup attitudes in intergenerational research (e.g., Hummert, O'Brian, Greenwald, & Mellott, 2002).

Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2: Communication accommodation, linguistic competence and relational solidarity

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that communication accommodation and linguistic competence with English would be positive predictors of relational solidarity. To test the hypotheses, regression analysis was conducted on relational solidarity. Results indicated that the two variables significantly predicted relational solidarity,

$F(2, 91) = 18.33$, adjusted $R^2 = .27$, $p < .001$. Japanese participants' linguistic competence ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.39$, $sr^2 = .05$, $p < .05$) and American's communication accommodation ($\beta = .37$, $t = 4.32$, $sr^2 = .15$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of relational solidarity.

Hypothesis 3: Relational solidarity as a mediator between intergroup communication and intergroup attitudes.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that relational solidarity would mediate the relationships between communication accommodation and linguistic competence and intergroup attitudes. The correlations (see Table 1) between the major measures show that the initial variables (i.e., CAT and linguistic competence) are correlated significantly with two of the outcome variables (i.e., cognitive and behavioral attitudes but not affective attitudes) and with the mediator variable (i.e., relational solidarity). Hence the mediator meets the prerequisite conditions for mediation analyses for two of the outcome variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). To test the mediation effects, six regression analyses were performed. The first set of analyses (i.e., two regression analyses) examined the relationships between each predictor variable and relational solidarity (i.e., the mediator variable), followed by the second set of analyses (i.e., four regression analyses) examining the joint effects of the two predictors and the mediator variable on the two criterion variables. Significance of mediation was assessed using the Goodman (1960) test, which examines whether the relationships between the predictor variables and the criterion variables are significantly reduced when the mediator is included. Mediation analysis results are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Correlation among the Major Variables.

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. English | 4.36 | 1.28 | | | | | |
| 2. CAT | 5.43 | .91 | .36** | | | | |
| 3. Relational Solidarity | 5.52 | .83 | .38** | .49** | | | |
| 4. Cognition | 4.73 | .81 | .26* | .18 [†] | .37** | | |
| 5. Behavior | 5.35 | 1.03 | .23* | .34** | .36** | .45** | |
| 6. Affect | 67.24 | 17.03 | .08 | .11 | .14 | .61** | .44** |

[†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note: Affect was measured based on a thermometer scale ranging from 0–99°. Other variables were measured on 7-point scales.

Table 2. Relational Solidarity as Mediator between Intergroup Communication and Intergroup Attitudes.

| | Predictors | | | |
|--|------------|-----|---------|-----|
| | CAT | | English | |
| | b | SE | b | SE |
| Predictor — Mediator | .45** | .08 | .24*** | .06 |
| Mediator — Behavioral Attitude | .32* | .14 | .40** | .13 |
| Predictor — Behavioral Attitude through Mediator | .24 | .12 | .09 | .08 |
| Goodman Test | 2.15* | | 2.46* | |
| Predictor — Mediator | .45*** | .08 | .24*** | .06 |
| Mediator — Cognitive Attitude | .37*** | .11 | .31** | .10 |
| Predictor — Cognitive Attitude through Mediator | -.00 | .10 | .09 | .07 |
| Goodman Test | 2.90* | | 2.47* | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Cognitive attitude. Results from regression analysis showed that CAT was a significant predictor of relational solidarity ($\beta = .45$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$) and that relational solidarity was a significant predictor of the cognitive attitude ($\beta = .37$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$). Goodman test result indicated that relationship between CAT and the cognitive attitude became insignificant ($\beta = -.00$, $SE = .10$, $p > .05$) when the mediator (i.e., relational solidarity) was introduced (Goodman test = 2.90, $p < .05$). Therefore, relational solidarity fully mediated the relationship between CAT and the cognitive attitude. Likewise, regression analysis showed that linguistic competence was a significant predictor of relational solidarity ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) and that relational solidarity was a significant predictor of the cognitive attitude ($\beta = .31$, $SE = .10$, $p < .01$). Goodman test result indicated that relationship between linguistic competence and the cognitive attitude became insignificant ($\beta = .09$, $SE = .07$, $p > .05$) when the mediator was introduced (Goodman test = 2.47, $p < .05$). Therefore, relational solidarity fully mediated the relationship between linguistic competence and the cognitive attitude.

Behavioral attitude. Results from regression analysis showed that CAT was a significant predictor of relational solidarity ($\beta = .45$, $SE = .08$, $p < .01$) and that relational solidarity was a significant predictor of the behavioral attitude ($\beta = .32$, $SE = .14$, $p < .05$). Goodman test result indicated that relationship between CAT and the behavioral attitude became insignificant ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .12$, $p > .05$) when the mediator was introduced (Goodman test = 2.15, $p < .05$). Therefore, relational solidarity fully mediated the relationship between CAT and the behavioral attitude. Similarly, re-

gression analysis showed that linguistic competence was a significant predictor of relational solidarity ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) and that relational solidarity was a significant predictor of the behavioral attitude ($\beta = .40$, $SE = .13$, $p < .01$). Goodman test result indicated that relationship between linguistic competence and the behavioral attitude became insignificant ($\beta = .09$, $SE = .08$, $p > .05$) when the mediator was introduced (Goodman test = 2.46, $p < .05$). Therefore, relational solidarity fully mediated the relationship between linguistic competence and the behavioral attitude.

Discussion

The current study investigated the relationships among Japanese sojourners' intercultural communication experiences, relational solidarity with their most frequent American contact, and their attitudes toward Americans in general. Specifically, this study tested a mediated model of cross-national intergroup communication variables (i.e., communication accommodation and linguistic competence), relational solidarity, and intergroup attitudes. Results demonstrated that communication accommodation and linguistic competence were positively associated with relational solidarity, which was a positive predictor of cognitive and behavioral attitudes. Mediation analyses revealed that relational solidarity fully mediated the relationships between intergroup contact and cognitive and behavioral attitudes. Altogether these findings indicate that positive intergroup contact such as communication accommodation and perceived linguistic competence are associated with relational solidarity between Japanese and Americans, and relational solidarity then contributes to positive intergroup attitudes.

At a very obvious level, the positive association between linguistic competence and relational solidarity indicates that we could establish good relationships when we have strong linguistic command. Gareis' (1995) argues that communication competence, especially linguistic performance, is tied to interaction process and thus influences socio-cultural adjustment. Unlike other intergroup contact situations (e.g., European Americans versus African Americans) when both groups share the same language, the Japanese participants' comfort with using English became a significant predictor of relational solidarity with their most frequent American contact. It is probably a natural phenomenon that Japanese participants with higher linguistic competence and comfort experience more pleasant interactions with Americans. Needless to say, perceived linguistic competence of the Japanese participants may have reduced communication anxiety and uncertainty, and thus encourage them to engage in more in-depth conversations or closer intercultural relationships with their American contact. While prior intergroup

research has extended to include cross-national participants (e.g., Greenland & Brown, 1999), the current study contributes to the literature by examining the direct link between language competence and positive intergroup relationships.

In addition, the positive association between communication accommodation and relational solidarity indicates that we could establish good relationships when we can exercise competent communication behaviors that display liking, respect, and affinity. The positive link between communication accommodation and relational solidarity is consistent with the major premise of CAT in that appropriate communication enhances relationships. It is a natural human behavior to identify ourselves in terms of group memberships, which are often based on cultural classifications in intercultural encounters (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In general, members of collectivistic cultures draw a sharper distinction between ingroup and outgroup memberships than those of individualistic cultures. In addition, the ingroup membership in collectivistic cultures has a strong influence on social behaviors (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). While Japanese people feel comfortable and confident in ingroup interactions (e.g., Schwartz, 1990), they may experience more anxieties and less comfortable feelings in intercultural interactions involving outgroup members due to the unpredictable aspects of communication with strangers. Obviously, communication accommodation has the potential to create interpersonal solidarity and thus enhances attitudes toward outgroup members by lowering intergroup boundaries (Ye, 2006). The current study measured participants' perceived comfort with English, which is an indicator of linguistic competence. We also included non-linguistic aspects of competence in the current study (i.e., the American individual's accommodation). That said, we did not include perceptions of self-accommodation. Future studies should include non-linguistic aspects of the communication in interactions of both parities (e.g., Harwood, 2000; Lin & Harwood, 2003).

Hofstede (1980) claims that people in collectivistic cultures, especially the Japanese culture, have high uncertainty avoidance. People from cultures of high uncertainty avoidance have strict rules and norms to protect themselves from encountering unpredictable situations (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Violations of norms and expectations of the message recipients resulting from inappropriate communication (see also Ball, Giles, Byrne, & Berechree, 1984) may disturb relational harmony. That said, the Japanese participants reported that they experienced appropriate communication accommodation from their most frequent American contact ($M = 5.46$ on 7-point scales), indicating that these intergroup communication experiences are essentially positive and personal.

The current study considers relational solidarity as an outcome variable of specific intergroup communication and as a predictor variable of intergroup attitudes. The examination of the mediating role of relational solidarity between

intergroup contact and intergroup attitudes also echoes Harwood et al.'s (2005) study of the roles of several individual level mediators that are "broadly associated with satisfying and enjoyable interaction and how this is communicated" in intergenerational relationships (p. 402). Supporting the argument on the importance of factors that mediate the relationship between the contact and intergroup attitudes, previous studies have demonstrated consistent findings that intergroup anxiety is a major variable that mediates and/or moderates the relationship (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Greenland & Brown, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). These studies have, however, focused predominantly on the group level anxiety (i.e., participants' reactions to a group of people in general or in hypothetical scenarios) felt or anticipated by the interactants. In recent years, communication scholars have started to pay attention to individual level factors (i.e., variables are examined at the level of specific relationship with an outgroup member) such as perspective taking, anxiety, disclosure in intergroup contact research (e.g., Harwood et al., 2005). Inclusion of individual level communication and relational variables is particularly critical from the cross-national intergroup contact perspective. Gareis (1995) reports that there are a considerable number of sojourners who are disappointed with the scarcity of interpersonal relationships that they are able to establish with host nationals. In a similar vein, Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) call for greater emphasis on positive intervening variables (e.g., empathy and perspective taking) in intergroup contact research. The mediator role of relational solidarity in the contact-attitude link further illustrates the importance to conceptualize intergroup relations as a process, in which communication accommodation and linguistic competence play important roles.

The majority of prior research has explored intergroup attitudes by combining all the dimensions of attitudes or focusing only on the affective or cognitive dimensions of attitudes. In particular, Tropp and Pettigrew's (2005a) study showed the importance of the inclusion of the affective and cognitive dimensions of attitude in intergroup contact research. Hence, the current study included the three dimensions of intergroup attitude (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and affective attitudes). Supporting our hypotheses, we found that Japanese sojourners' positive contact with their most frequent American contact contributed to improved cognitive and behavioral attitudes toward Americans as a group, but not their affective attitudes. In other words, findings in the current study indicate that the affective aspect of intergroup attitudes might be less sensitive to positive contact between group members.

The affective dimension of intergroup attitudes is conceptualized as one's inner feelings (e.g., warmth and liking) toward outgroup members as a whole. According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), the affective indices of prejudice tend to yield stronger contact effects than such cognitive indices as stereotypes, albeit

the contact effects are significantly stronger for majority group members than for members of minority status groups. Findings in prior studies have indicated that individuals are capable of transferring their positive intercultural experiences to overall evaluations of that cultural group at the cognitive and affective levels (e.g., Greenland & Brown, 1999; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). That said, Greenland and Brown (1999) measured negative affect using items that are similar to the behavioral dimension of intergroup attitudes in the current study (e.g., I get bored talking to Japanese nationals). Tropp and Pettigrew (2005a) pointed that the contact effect is substantially sensitive to how the outcome variables are operationalized. In this regard, the insignificant findings from the current study with the affective attitudes might be due to methodological issues. The affective dimension is the only variable that was measured using a single item in this study. Single-item measures in general are limited in terms of reliability compared with multiple-item measures. Reliability concerns might contribute to the insignificant effects we observed.

One constraint of this study was the potential deviation of the characteristics of the current sample from the traits of the majority of Japanese living in Japan. It is likely that those who come to study in the United States are willing to communicate with Americans and to establish close relationships with Americans and have more positive attitudes about America. In other words, the Japanese sojourners might be more motivated to engage in intercultural communication and relationships that may have influenced their overall positive attitudes toward Americans. Future research should also consider longitudinal studies in which both attitude formation and attitude change can be investigated.

In an age of globalization that promotes ethnic and cultural diversity, there will be a growing need to understand intercultural communication and relations. As the world becomes more diverse, scholarly attention should be devoted to promote appreciation of multiethnic/multicultural interactions. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) state that one of the reasons for humans to communicate is to change another person's attitudes or behaviors and that inevitable activity of humans, communication, may change our perceptions of the world.

References

- Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2004). Collective identity: Group membership and self-conception. In M. B. Brewer & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Self and social identity* (pp. 147–181). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Ball, P., Giles, H., Byrne, J. L., & Berechree, P. (1984). Situational constraints in the evaluative significance of speech accommodation: Some Australian data. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 46, 115–130.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173–1182.
- Brewer, M. B., & Miller, N. (1996). *Intergroup relations*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Brislin, R. W. (1986). Prejudice and intergroup communication. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Intergroup communication* (pp. 74–85). London: Edward Arnold.
- Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30, 745–778.
- Brown, R., & Hewstone, M. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 37, 255–343.
- Christian, S. E., & Lapinski, M. K. (2003). Support for the contact hypothesis: High school students' attitudes toward Muslims post 9–11. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 32, 247–263.
- Cooke, M. A. (1978). A pair of instruments for measuring student attitudes toward bearers of the target culture. *Foreign Language Annals*, 11, 149–163.
- Eller, A., & Abrams, D. (2004). Come together: Longitudinal comparisons of Pettigrew's reformulated intergroup contact model and the common intergroup identity model in Anglo-French and Mexican-American contexts. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 34, 229–256.
- Gareis, E. (1995). *Intercultural friendship: A qualitative study*. London: University Press of America, Inc.
- Giles, H., Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1991). Accommodation theory: Communication, contexts and consequence. In H. Giles, N. Coupland, & J. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics* (pp. 1–68). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Giles, H., & Johnson, P. (1987). Ethnolinguistic identity theory: A social psychological approach to language maintenance. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 68, 69–99.
- Goodman, L. A. (1960). On the exact variance of products. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 55, 708–713.
- Greenland, K., & Brown, R. (1999). Categorization and intergroup anxiety in contact between British and Japanese nationals. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29, 503–321.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (4th Ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Nishida, T. (1994). *Bridging Japanese/North American differences*. London: Sage.
- Harwood, J. (2000). Communicative predictors of solidarity in the grandparent–grandchild relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 17, 743–766.
- Harwood, J. (2010, in press). The contact space: A novel framework for intergroup contact research. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29 (2).
- Harwood, J., Giles, H., & Palomares, N. A. (2005). Intergroup theory and communication processes. In J. Harwood & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 1–17). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

- Harwood, J., Hewstone, M., Paolini, S., & Voci, A. (2005). Grandparent-grandchild contact and attitudes toward older adults: Moderator and mediator effects. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 393–406.
- Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50, 93–98.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hummert, M. L. (1994). Stereotypes of the elderly and patronizing speech. In M. L. Hummert, J. M. Wiemann, & J. F. Nussbaum (Eds.), *Interpersonal communication in older adulthood*. London: Sage.
- Hummert, M. L., O'Brian, L. T., Greenwald, A. G., & Mellott, D. S. (2002). Using the implicit association test to measure age differences in implicit social cognitions. *Psychology and Aging*, 17, 482–495.
- Institute of International Education. (2009). *Open doors 2008 data tables*. Retrieved May 7, 2010, from <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=150811>
- Islam, M. R., & Hewstone, M. (1993). Dimensions of contact as predictors of intergroup anxiety, perceived out-group variability, and out-group attitude: An integrative model. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19, 700–710.
- Kim, M. S. (2002). *Non-Western perspectives on human communication*. London: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1991). Intercultural communication competence: A systems-theoretic views. In S. Ting-Toomey & F. Korzeny (Eds.), *Cross-cultural interpersonal communication*. London: Sage.
- Kudo, K., & Simkin, K. A. (2003). Intercultural friendship formation: The case of Japanese students at an Australian university. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 24, 91–114.
- Lin, M. C., & Harwood, J. (2003). Predictors of grandparent-grandchild relational solidarity in Taiwan. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 20, 537–563.
- Operario, D., & Fiske, S. T. (2003). Stereotypes: Content, structure, processes, and context. In R. Brown & S. Gaertner (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intergroup processes* (pp. 22–44). Oxford, Blackwell.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1997). Generalized intergroup contact effects on prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 173–186.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1986). The intergroup contact hypothesis reconsidered. In M. Hewstone & R. Brown (Eds.), *Contact and conflict in intergroup encounters* (pp. 169–195). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice?: Meta-analytic tests of three mediators. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 922–934.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 751–783.
- Rose, T. L. (1981). Cognitive and dyadic processes in intergroup contact. In D. L. Hamilton (Ed.), *Cognitive processes in stereotyping and intergroup behavior*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1990). Individualism-collectivism: Critique and proposed refinements. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 21, 139–157.
- Soliz, J., & Harwood, J. (2006). Shared family identity, age salience, and intergroup contact: Investigation of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. *Communication Monographs*, 73, 87–107.

- Soliz, J., & Harwood, J. (2003). Perceptions of communication in a family relationship and the reduction of intergroup prejudice. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 31, 320–345.
- Stephan, W. G., Diaz-Loving, R., & Duran, A. (2000). Integrated threat theory and intercultural attitudes: Mexico and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31, 240–249.
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1985). Intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41, 157–175.
- Tropp, L. R. (2003). The psychological impact of prejudice: Implications for intergroup contact. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 6, 131–149.
- Tropp, L. R., & Pettigrew, T. F. (2005a). Differential relationships between intergroup contact and affective and cognitive dimensions of prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 1145–1158.
- Tropp, L. R., & Pettigrew, T. F. (2005b). Relationships between intergroup contact and prejudice among minority and majority status groups. *Psychological Science*, 16, 951–957.
- Voci, A., & Hewstone, M. (2003). Intergroup contact and prejudice toward immigrants in Italy: The mediational role of anxiety and the moderational role of group salience. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 6, 37–54.
- Wheeless, L. R. (1978). A follow-up study of the relationships among trust, disclosure, and interpersonal solidarity. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 143–157.
- Williams, A., & Giles, H. (1996). Intergenerational conversations: Young adults' retrospective accounts. *Human Communication Research*, 23, 220–250.
- Ye, J. (2006). An examination of acculturative stress, interpersonal social support, and use of online ethnic social groups among Chinese international students. *Howard Journal of Communication*, 17, 1–20.

Author's address

Makiko Imamura and Yan Bing Zhang
102 Bailey Hall
1440 Jayhawk Blvd.
Department of Communication Studies
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS. 66045
ybzhang@ku.edu
makimamu@ku.edu

Jake Harwood
University of Arizona
jharwood@u.arizona.edu