Katarzyna Kość-Ryżko
(Warszawa)

BETWEEN STRANGENESS AND FAMILIARITY. THE PROCESS OF ACCULTURATION IN THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL APPROACH

In the last years Europe becomes a scene of considerable political and ethnical changes. Globalization, the idea of multiculturalism and forced migration have become a stimulus to numerous cultural contacts, but also to new conflicts.

This causes that intercultural relations become a commonplaceness even in the communities, which were monoculture and homogenous until now. The cultural adaptation and the process of the acculturation of migrants is one of most difficult challenge both for newcomers, as also for the receiving (hosting) community. This indicates many problems and difficulties which, for the common well-being better should not be ignored. The research experience of ethnologists and cultural anthropologists could be very useful and assistive here. The cultural knowledge and the comprehension of the problems of acculturation and its dynamics with the consciousness of the most frequent consequences – social, cultural and psychological, appears very helpful – among other things – in preparing integration programs for foreigners, adjusting education system and not seldom in preventing conflicts.

The acculturation understood as process happening, when two cultures enter in reciprocal contact, causes many changes of different meanings both in individuals and in groups [7, p. 1]. The influences refer to the «guests» and the «hosts» as well. Consequently, the process of adaptation affects also political decisions and the attitude of the governments toward foreigners [2, p. 617].

In my article I talk over the problem of acculturation both in the cultural aspects (changes of customs, mentality, system of values, morality etc.), and also in psychological (taking into account the problems of the adaptive stress, the cultural shock and personality change). First of all however I point out the main challenges and difficulties dealing with the adaptation to new cultural environment.

Acculturation and its meaning
for ethnology research

Contact between people of different cultures is not a new phenomenon. Throughout human history, mankind has traveled around the world for various reasons. Either in search of greener pastures, fleeing from persecution and catastrophe, to trade or to conquer and colonize, or in search of diverse backgrounds [14, p. 54–56]. This process has led to changes in the original patterns of life and cultures of the people concerned, as well as to the formation of new societies [4, p. 15]. The meeting of cultures and the resulting changes are what collectively has come to be known as acculturation.

This increased interest in the field of acculturation is attributed to several reasons, but they all boil down to two main issues:

1. the increase in worldwide migration, due to natural and man-made disasters such as war, conflict, poverty and famine, as well as to improved means of traveling over larger distances;

2. the increasing importance of understanding the link between culture and human behavior that has been advanced by those working in the field of ethnology and cross-cultural psychology [10, p. 125].

There is hardly any country that is presently not affected by migration in one way or another, either as a sender or as receiver. There are both positive and negative aspects to these migrations. For sending countries, one of their concerns is brain-drain, but, on the positive side, monetary remittances from abroad serve to support their families and bolster

their domestic economies. For the receiving countries, they may be concerned with ethnic conflicts and social problems, on the negative side. However, on the positive side, immigrants contribute to their demographic base during times of population decline, as well as to economic development. In spite of the fact that the one major motivating factor in migration is to improve one's personal, social and economic situation, most migrants face several challenges as they traverse two or more cultures [5, p. 13; 3, p. 86–87]. All in all, it is not surprising that migration is not simply a personal issue but one that attracts vested political interests with important global implications. It leads to a meeting between people of different backgrounds and in the process leads to changes in the original cultural patterns.

The effect of acculturation, even if we assume that it is a never-ending process, is the product of many factors, which depend on us, to a greater or lesser extent, and of the events happening by chance [12, p. 5]. Yet, some stages and characteristics of the acculturation process are common to all cases, so they can be distinguished, observed and controlled. Acculturation, as a social, cultural and psychological process, is a great field of examination for ethnologists, because it inspires them and provides them with abundant research material. Cultural patterns of behaviors, generated through the collision and «negotiation» between two different social realities, can be compared with the colorful mosaic in children's kaleidoscope, in which the colorful pieces of glass are moved. When turning it, various figures arise, but only for a short while, as, after turning the kaleidoscope again, the glasses are moved again and another pattern arises.

The basic acculturation questions

Examining the acculturation processes of various ethnic and cultural groups, getting in contact with each other can, in turn, be compared to a complicated scientific experiment. Yet, in this case, the experiment is carried out not in a sterile laboratory, but within our «stable and predictable» societies, where we ourselves are very often the objects of this experiment, either as «guests» or as «hosts». Some ethnologists working in this field came to be interested in a parallel question:

«How do people born and raised in one society manage to live in another society that is culturally different from the one they are used to?»

Presumably this is the basic acculturation question [14, p. 77]. It is rooted in the finding that people develop behaviors that are adapted to living successfully in their own sociocultural contexts [2, p. 619]. If this is the case, what happens to people when they take their behavioral repertoire to a different cultural context? We can imagine a number of possible answers to this question. One is that their behavior remains unchanged, and they may risk becoming maladapted to their new setting. Another is that their behavior changes rather easily and rapidly as they learn to live well in their new setting. And a third is that there is a complex pattern of both behavioral continuity and change as people negotiate how to live in their new society [6, p. 994–996]. This complexity involves many social and psychological processes, including culture customs, religious rituals, social learning, stress and coping, identity, resilience, mental illness, conflict and many others. It is this very complexity that has spurred the development of this field of acculturation anthropology.

In this place it is worth to indicate in a few short and clear points, **why are the acculturation processes worth being examined by ethnologists?** The most important aspects in my opinion are:

– because these issues are very timely and crucial for maintaining social consensus; it requires a great cultural knowledge, interdisciplinary approach and the responsibility for the conclusions formulated;

– because ethnologists are very much experienced in examining the problems of culture, and identity in various social, historical and political contexts;

303

– it is also a chance for the discipline we practice to contribute significantly to the social debate on the future shape of European societies;

– it provides the possibility to help the foreigners and immigrants in their adaptation, as well as the their target societies in understanding cultural differences;

– it pays attention to the practical and applied aspects of cultural anthropology and ethnology.

The second issue related to the mentioned above is embodied in the next crucial question: **why, while examining the acculturation processes, should ethnologists take into account their psychological aspects?** Analogically as before I try to answer in a few sentences:

– Acculturation is a comprehensive process, taking place on all fundamental levels: on the ontogenetic, i. e. psychological level; on the social, i. e. relational level, and on the cultural, i.e. identification level; ignoring any of them is a reductionist approach.

– If we take into account the emotions of the people being examined (as much as possible), we are able to see a real man, and not just dehumanized products of his activities.

– Showing the ontogenetic sphere of the cultural adaptation and various ways of managing the culture shock, adaptation stress and other difficult emotional challenges allows to draw conclusions concerning human nature in general or in particular; these conclusions can then be used in practice to help immigrants.

Acculturation: conceptual background

Although *acculturation* is now a term commonly used in discussions around immigrants and refugees [13], the term, its meaning and operationalization within the social sciences still remain elusive [1, p. 361]. In the simplest sense **«acculturation»** covers all the changes that arise following «contact» between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds [7, p. 1]. A more formal definition was proposed by a few American anthropologists (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits) in 1936. They defined acculturation as «those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups» [7, p. 1].

«Psychological acculturation» refers to the changes an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures, or participating in the acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing. This kind of acculturation often involves affective, behavioral and cognitive changes, in the individual, in what have been termed the ABCs of acculturation by Coleen Ward [1]. Ward and her colleagues have distinguished between two kinds of adaptation: psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Broadly speaking, psychological adaptation refers to psychological or emotional wellbeing and satisfaction while sociocultural adaptation is concerned with the acquisition of the culturally appropriate skills needed to negotiate or «fit into» a specific social or cultural milieu [12, p. 5–7].

Other related concepts to acculturation processes are: interculturation, enculturation, socialization, re-socialization, globalization, multiculturalism, ethnic identity. On account of the scantiness of the place I will confine myself here exclusively to defining only ethnic identity, which is directly connected with the notion of acculturation. The term «ethnic identity» refers to one form of cultural identity and deals with how individuals and groups define and make sense of themselves, in terms of the ethnic group they originally belonged to and a new cultural group. For many individuals and groups, prior to acculturation, they may not have a very clear sense of their ethnicity as this is taken for granted. However, when the individual or group comes into contact with another group that is culturally different, they may be forced to define a sense of identity in line with their ethnicity. Ethnic identity may therefore be thought of as an aspect of acculturation [14, p. 76].

Psychological dimension of acculturation and culture shock

The term «culture shock» was first used, in 1958, by the researcher, Kalvaro Oberg to describe a certain kind of anxiety felt by a person who moved into the new environment [5]. Actually, it is generally accepted that the notion «culture shock» expresses discomfort in the situation of lack of clues and understanding of what to do and how to do certain things in a new environment. It also expresses the lack of knowledge of what is acceptable or unacceptable in a given place or situation [8, p. 2]. The plaguing feeling of culture shock appears during the first few weeks after moving into a new environment and it is described as a physical and emotional feeling of inadequacy, experienced by an individual who has to live in a different country or in the environment, which differs significantly from the one, he or she comes from. This person perceives everything as being different from the things known for him or her, e. g.:

– used language
– public transport
– cuisine
– religion
– use of some basic appliances like a cash machine or telephone, etc.

The prolonged contact with the diverse culture may lead to the problems with physical and mental functioning of a human being. The knowledge of how to react in various existential situations acquired so far, becomes useless, which brings about fear and disorientation, which, in turn, strengthens the withdrawal from a new cultural environment [9, p. 23–25]. The responses to such experiences may be the negative assessments of one's intelligence, skills, competence or life initiative.

The most frequent features of culture shock are:
– the tension resulting from the necessity of mental adaptation to a new environment;
– the rejection of a new culture by an individual and vice versa, being rejected by this culture;
– the raise of ambiguity in understanding one's role, expectations, feelings and identity.

Also, some circumstances may be conducive to the culture shock:
– when there are no familiar situations around an individual;
– when familiar situations get different meaning;
– when difficult situations, like conflicts at work, appear.

In the above circumstances, there can appear the reactions of fear and escape, depression and feeling of hostility.

The typical psycho-somatic symptoms accompanying the culture shock are:
– sorrow, loneliness, melancholy
– focusing too much on one's own health
– fear and disorientation
– inability to act and the feeling of helplessness
– pains, diseases, allergies
– insomnia or drowsiness, waking up at nights
– changes in one's temper, depression, irritability, susceptibility to injuries, the feeling of helplessness
– being upset, angry, getting offended easily, the unwillingness of getting in contact with others
– the identification with one's previous culture or its idealization
– loss of one's own identity
– trying heavily to absorb all the things from a new culture or country
– inability to solve simple problems
– the lack of trust
– the feeling of inadequacy or threat
– developing stereotypes concerning a new culture

− the development of obsessions, e.g. caring too much about cleanliness

− longing for one's family

− the feeling of being neglected, lost, worn-out or exploited [5, p. 33].

The stages of culture shock:

I. The tourist stage (the honeymoon)

This stage lasts from a few weeks up to a few months. The differences in culture of a new society are not only something new, but also funny, exciting, interesting and provoking.

II. The stage of disappointment and crisis (I want to come back home)

The excitement starts decreasing, slowly at first and then faster and faster. Everything becomes less and less interesting, the differences between one's first and second culture start being more visible, annoying and difficult to understand and predict. It makes a man feel more and more tension and disorientation. At the same time, the «hosts» also come back to their routines and start treating a newcomer as a normal element of reality.

III. *The stage of change and adjustment (I have to manage somehow)*

Depending on one's personal features, this stage may be long or short and is similar to the process of recovering from the depression; the direction of the feeling of aggression changes from inside to the outside one. An individual blames other people for his or her troubles and this is accompanied by the feelings of anger, hostility and rejection of a new culture. In the same time, the awareness of the problems connected with a new culture and the level of understanding them increase.

The people undergoing this stage are full of aggression, anger, tension, fear and frustration towards a new culture. They think a new culture is bad and the previous one was good, they idealize the country which they left. Such behaviors are not accepted within a new environment, which makes the mutual contact still more difficult.

IV. The stage of adaptation (things are not so bad)

This period enables more reasonable and comprehensive look at the whole situation; advantages and disadvantages of a new culture could be seen. The need of defense disappears gradually and a new culture becomes less hostile. The stronger feeling of self-confidence appears. Sometimes it happens that an individual even overestimates his or her degree of adaptation and treats himself or herself as an expert in a new culture [9, p. 67–70].

V. The Recurrence − secondary culture shock (re-entry shock)

Occurs when a person decides to come back to his or hers home country and finds everything different than it was before the move and it starts the whole process of adaptation again…

John Berry's acculturation model

The person who underwent all the stages of culture shock, is able to accept the fact that everyone is a product of his or her own culture, which determines his or her identity, regulates his or her behavior as well as determines his or her living space. It is accompanied by the awareness that there are no cultures, which are better or worse, and that each culture must be estimated and experienced according to its own principles and norms, because each of them possesses its own unique attitudes, values and convictions, constituting the internally consistent system.

The Canadian researcher, John Berry is the author of the most famous theoretical model of 4 acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, marginalization and separation) [1, p. 365]. This model is nowadays regarded as classical but a bit controversial one [13; 12, p. 5]. In the later period John Berry revived and refined earlier proposals about eight kinds of acculturation, based on whether or not heritage culture and identity are maintained, on whether or not relationships with other groups are sought, and on whether or not these are the choices of the minority or of the larger society. Preference for loss of heritage but for relationships with other groups is **assimilation [-F+C]** if chosen by a minority group

and **melting pot [-F+C]** if decided by the larger society. Preference for maintenance of heritage culture and identity but for minimal relationships with other groups is **separation [+F-C]** if chosen by a minority group and **segregation [+F-C]** if decided by the larger society. Preference for maintenance of heritage culture and identity is **integration [+F+C]** if chosen by a minority group and **multiculturalism [+F+C]** if decided by the larger society. Preference for loss of heritage culture and for minimal relationships with other groups is **marginalization [-F-C]** if chosen by a minority group and **exclusion [-F-C]** if decided by the larger society [11, p. 12, 26, 33].

So, it is obvious, the integration policy of the given issues can weaken or strengthen examples of the relation which are a result of bilateral preferences of acculturation, both the guests and the hosts.

Social aspects of acculturation

Social aspects of acculturation concern first of all such areas of personal and group functioning as: relation with the public administration and state offices, school, job and work, family, neighbors, social life, religious life, leisure time.

In relation to the mensioned above, if we want to assess the extent of the acculturation of the new comers, generally we should focus our research interest on a few main issues related to: language, religious beliefs, educational status, employment, social norms, social status, media usage, social relations, and gender roles.

Examples of acculturation difficulties in everyday life

In order to show the challenges of the acculturation into a new environment, I will use a few examples from my recent research on the immigrant children. These examples indicate that sometimes minor matters may cause great difficulties and tension; and that the lack of understanding and communication may lead to the tension, frustration, stereotypes, and prejudices and even to open conflicts.

The main misunderstanding and conflictogenous areas are:

− **culinary customs** (the difference in the appearance, smell and taste of culture dishes; what is edible and non-edible; kosher dishes, halal meat etc.);

− **physical appearance and dressing code** (head-dressing of cloths and veil by Muslim women, dressing hidżabs, burkas, jewelry, make-up, some kind of shoes, as sandals, flip-flops, etc.;

− **socialization customs** (e. g. punishment and beating of children, showing feeling toward children, coping with difficult emotions, acceptance of the aggression of children);

− **customary sexual roles** (beating of women, men's aggression and domination, order of the paying respect towards men, men's exclusion from the taking care of children and house works etc.);

− **customs associated with the marriage** (early getting married of girls in their 12−13 year, customs contrary to the law obliging in a given country)

− **religious customs** (prohibition of working in given hours or days, customs and rituals contrary to the local customs and law and make difficult everyday functioning, for example, Ramadan and children omissing schools).

Conclusions

Acculturation shows clearly that changing the cultural environment and adopting to the lifestyle of a new social and cultural environment is an extremely difficult and strenuous process. It is a continual search for compromise between the heritage of one's own culture and of a new one. The route from the alienation to the familiarity is a great challenge, difficult to meet on one's own. That's why, the effort of ethnologists in analyzing and describing these issues is extremely important and valuable. This research is not only of scientific but also of practical value, because the results can be used to help both the «guests» and the «hosts» as well as the governments (and public administration workers)

in the countries, which get more and more helpless facing vast amounts of immigrants coming.

What is not so important and worth to mention is that in spite of the general abundance of acculturation research, one area of research thas not been covered yet. It is comparative studies that cover more than a few countries. Moreover there is lack of research and works dealing with problem in Central and Eastern European countries (such as for example Ukraine) − what could also be a reasonable motivation for such comparison based on international research cooperation studies.

1. *Berry J.-W.* A critique of critical acculturation // International Journal of Intercultural Relations. − 2009. − Vol. 33. − Issue 5. − P. 361−371.
2. *Berry J.-W.* A psychology of immigration ‖ Journal of Social Issues/ − 2001. − Vol. 57. − P. 615−631.
3. *Berry J.-W., Kim U., Power S., Young M., Bujaki M.* Acculturation attitudes in plural societies // Applied Psychology: An International Review. − 1989. − Vol. 38. − P. 185−206.
4. *Brislin R.-W.* Cross-Cultural Encounters. Face-to-Face Interaction. − New Jork : Pergamon Press, 1981.
5. Culture Shock & The Problem of Adjustment to New Cultural Environments / (ed.) K. Oberg // Health, Welfare and Housing Division. −New York, 1999.
6. *Folkman S., Lazarus R.-S., Dunkiel-Schetter C., DeLongis A., Gruen R.-J.* Dynamics of a stressful encounter: Cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes // Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. − 1986. − Vol. 50. − P. 992−1003.
7. *Glick T.* (). Acculturation // The Dictionary of Anthropology / ed. T. Barfield. − Blackwell Publishing, 2006. − S. 1.
8. *Guanipa C., Dept.* Of Counseling and School Psychology. − San Diego State University. − http://www.jyu.fi/mclinic/cis/acculturation.html.
9. *Jungman T.-J., Lewis R.-E.* On Being Foreign: Culture Shock in Short Fiction // An International Anthology. − Yarmouth : Intercultural Press, Inc., 1986
10. *Lillesaar W.* (). Integration − a lifelong never ending leaving and adjustment proces / (ed.) K. Hakola // Migration and Refugee Policy on the Eastern Border of the European Union. − Јувдскулд, 1998. − P. 123−139.
11. *Rudmin F.-W.* Catalogue of acculturation constructs: Descriptions of 126 taxonomies, 1918−2003 / (eds.) W.-J. Lonner, D.-L. Dinnel, S.-A. Hayes, D.-N. Sattler − Online Readings in Psychology and Culture (Unit 8, Chapter 8). − 2003. − http://www.wwu.edu/~culture [dostęp: 10.04.2008]. − Center for Cross-Cultural Research, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington USA.
12. *Rudmin F.-W.* Critical History of the Acculturation Psychology of Asssimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization // Review of General Psychology. −2003. − Vol. 7. − N 1. − P. 3−37.
13. *Rudmin F.-W.* Debate in science: The case of acculturation //AnthroGlobe Journal. − 2006. − http://malinowski.kent.ac.ik/docs/rudminf_acculturation_061204.pdf or http://www.anthroglobe.ca/docs/rudminf_acculturation_061204.pdf) [dostęp: 21.01.2010].
14. The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology / (eds.) *Sam D.-L., Berry J. W.* − Cambridge University Press, 2006.