

## THEORETICAL MODELS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF IMMIGRANTS

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**Abstract.** *Communication is the act of sharing information and it generally involves the use of oral or written symbols and, in other circumstances, it covers different types of nonverbal symbols such as body language, painting, music, crafts, sculpture or gestures. Building effective communication skills and relationships is often challenging, being the medium for group interactions, public relations and family. This study explores the interpersonal relationships of immigrants and it properly is a current topic because immigration to the European Union states has rapidly increased and immigrant groups are more diverse than ever before. The purpose is to analyze the immigrants attitudes, experiences but also expectations of their interpersonal communication and relationships and the way they expand and maintain them, and also to understand how interpersonal communication affects the immigrants adaptation to the new environment. The main rule of mutual respect is the basis for success in communication and relationships, as well as accepting and understanding cultural differences and the new language without judging them. Cultural differences are often easily identified and therefore, easy to adapt to, but others are considerably more difficult. In this respect, I considered as opportune to bring into question and compare important theories provided and investigated by specialists in interpersonal communication. They offer a clear overview and examination of understanding the immigrants participation to the process of interpersonal communication in the host country.*

**Keywords:** *interpersonal communication, second language acquisition, host society, multiculturalism*

The sense of belonging and identity are closely linked to adaptation process. In order to understand immigrants' life situation it is important to study the development of the person's ethnic and cultural identity and see how it is forming in the new cultural environment, by interacting with new people and situations that immigrants have to face.

During interpersonal communication, there is message sending and message receiving. This can be conducted using both direct and indirect methods. Successful interpersonal communication is when the message senders and the message receivers understand the message. A large number of scholars collectively identify with and use the term interpersonal communication to describe their own work. These scholars, however, also recognize that there is a considerable variety in how they and their colleagues conceptually and operationally define this area of study. In some regards, the construct of interpersonal communication is like a dynamic and



changing phenomena. Thus, attempts to identify exactly what interpersonal communication is or is not, are often frustrating and fall short of consensus<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, many who research and theorize about interpersonal communication do so from across many different research paradigms and theoretical traditions<sup>2</sup>. While there are many definitions available, interpersonal communication is often defined as the communication that takes place between people who are interdependent and have some knowledge of each other. Interpersonal communication includes what takes place between a son and his father, an employer and an employee, two sisters, a teacher and a student, two lovers, two friends, and so on. Although largely dyadic in nature, interpersonal communication is often extended to include small intimate groups such as the family. Interpersonal communication can take place in face-to-face settings, as well as through media platforms, such as social media<sup>3</sup>.

Over time, people realized the importance of staying in touch with their cultural backgrounds, including the language of their native countries. The main issue presented now lies in communication and interaction with each other, for it is obvious that miscommunication causes discomfort.

Trying to bridge the communication gap between different individuals makes building communication skills and relationships even more difficult. People from many different countries, of different cultures, speaking different languages come together in a single place where they manage to find their identity. But sometimes this becomes more difficult than one could believe because core values and perceptions must be acknowledged as they are, so that interpersonal communication and relationships should occur. Parts of verbal communication, such as, tonality, tense, gender generalities and structure vary greatly from culture to culture. Some immigrants gradually pick up the language, but do not learn enough to bridge the communication gaps between themselves and the government. There are major problems for immigrants with respect to the recognition of their academic attainments and qualifications. Moreover, the problem of the ability to speak the language of the host country is still in many cases the main obstacle to successful integration and communication with each other.

### **Adaptation of immigrants as a communication-based phenomenon**

Individuals begin to adapt only as they communicate with others in their new environment. Integration relies on that interaction with the host society, and the degree to which an individual adapts depends on the amount and nature of communication with members of the host society. The context where interpersonal communication occurs generally refers to the environment in which communication

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<sup>1</sup> Knapp, Mark L. and Daly John A., *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, fourth edition, The University of Texas at Austin, USA, 2011, p.24

<sup>2</sup> Manning, J., *A Constitutive Approach to Interpersonal Communication Studies. Communication Studies* 65 (4): 432–440, 2014, p. 433

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip\\_us\\_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205943608.pdf](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205943608.pdf)

takes place and is where it may be influenced. This includes the time and place, as well as the background of the participants<sup>4</sup>. In any given environment or situation a conversation takes place in, many contexts may be interacting at the same time. Additionally, interest in the role of families and occasionally among other key roles in the health care system are all factors on the context of interpersonal communication, context including all aspects of social channels.

There are researchers in the field of interpersonal communication, who investigated the immigrants behavioral participation to communication while living and perceiving the host country, investigations tested and supported by surveys on a great number of immigrants.

Dr. Young Yun Kim is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, and through her academic interest and efforts she concluded in one of her articles that communication patterns of foreign immigrants in the process of acculturation are conceptualized on cognitive and behavioral levels. The cognitive level is observed in the complexity of an immigrant's perception of the host society, the behavioral level, in the immigrant's involvement in the host society through interpersonal and mass communication. In her opinion three causal factors are identified as major determinants of the immigrant's communication patterns: language competence, acculturation motivation, and accessibility to host communication channels<sup>5</sup>. Kim also added that interpersonal communication is a "major channel through which learning about the host society is transmitted to the immigrants"<sup>6</sup>.

Kim's research has most strongly emphasized the relationship of interpersonal communication and assimilation. She found that "interpersonal communication is generally considered more intense, direct and has a detailed influence on the immigrant's adaptation to the host socio-cultural system"<sup>7</sup>. Professor Kim also appreciates the result of interpersonal communication which can lead to personal growth, the realization of one's potential and the establishment of meaningful human relationships. The interpersonal relationship patterns represent the purposes, function and product of the immigrant's interpersonal communication. Dr. Kim also states that the effective interpersonal communication leads to a better understanding of host culture and society.

In her research, Kim introduced anecdotal stories and testimonials of immigrants and sojourners available in non-technical sources such as reports, biographies, letters, diaries, dialogues, commentaries and other materials in magazines, newspapers, fiction and nonfiction books, radio programs and televisions programs. These individual accounts are not scientific data, but rather

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<sup>4</sup> White, Corbin, C., D., *Interpersonal Communication: A Cultural Approach*, Sydney, NS. Cape Breton University Press, 2008, p. 17

<sup>5</sup> Kim, Y. Y., *A casual model of communication patterns of foreign immigrant in the process of acculturation*, paper presented at annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association (62nd), San Francisco, December 27-30, pp. 46

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 48

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 49

serve as a vital source of insights into the "lived experiences" of cross cultural adaptation<sup>8</sup>.

Theorists Brein and David explained, in their work, about intercultural communication, that effective communication is "dependent on the development of understanding between himself and his host. The degree that they are able to engender an effective flow or exchange of information will determine the extent that mutual understanding can develop"<sup>9</sup>.

The interpersonal communication activity can also be observed through the degree of the immigrant's interaction with members of the host society. The immigrants who practice their interpersonal communication predominantly through an ethnic interpersonal network, ethnic organization, club, and ethnic community, are considered less assimilated than those who associate primarily with members of the host society.

To support this, the expert in communication, professor Kelman, suggested that the immigrants can increase their interpersonal communication by participating "in an ongoing enterprise, maintaining the self-esteem of the host, and by introducing common goals as the result of combining his effort with the hosts on a particular task". In addition to interpersonal communication the importance of mass media is often addressed by researchers who study the consumption of host country media by immigrants.

Researcher Ryu J.S. also found that, when the second language of immigrants and its proficiency is low, the greater is the need for an immigrant to learn this second language through the mass media. He finally stated that mass media, particularly television, "function as the primary neo-socialization agent of the immigrants who have not received their education in the host country"<sup>10</sup>. A similar study conducted among Asian immigrants in England reported that the immigrants who were classified as non-English speaking watched television almost every day. Clearly, the immigrants find it easier to follow television programs, especially those who have less or no knowledge of English. In fact, the immigrants are given the chance of using mass media to obtain information about new culture and to adjust to the new environment.

Significant mutations have happened in diasporas' identities once with the communication and media technology evolution. The revolutionary changes in communication and media techniques, mainly the online journalism, creates a new reader, participating to debates, formulating observations, objections and points of view. This is the way to an active reception which creates closeness to the

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<sup>8</sup> Kim, Young Yun, *Adapting to a New Culture. In Gudykunst, W (Ed.), Theorizing about intercultural communication*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2005

<sup>9</sup> Brein, M. & David, K. H., *Intercultural communication and the adjustment of the sojourner*, Psychological Bulletin, 215-30, 1971, p. 43

<sup>10</sup> Ryu, J. S., *Mass media and the assimilation process: A study of media uses of Korean immigrants*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Oregon, 1977, p. 2, accessed on <http://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/01-Kandawadee-Sakdisubha-L.-Brooks-Hill-James-F.-Horrell.pdf>

immigrant readers, media being a substantial link of communication of immigrants<sup>11</sup>.

### **Models and theories on second language acquisition**

The term *second language* is used throughout this article to refer to any language, other than the native language. Thus it is synonymous with *foreign language*.

It is argued that the weak incentive structures for second language acquisition for an immigrant appear in four analytically separate spheres including the labour market, political, social and education spheres. These analyzed spheres also include the social-marriage network. Furthermore, two integration regimes are imposed in these spheres: no government interference or government-mandated minimum language acquisition after arrival. Along with communication inconvenience, the language barrier among immigrants also contributes to racial tension<sup>12</sup>.

We should assess the immigrant linguistic integration experience in each sphere to provide insights into the underlying incentive system for language acquisition and to predict, in the absence of government intervention, what level of foreign-born language acquisition will voluntarily result in each activity sphere. We strongly believe that the optimal choice of second language acquisition by an immigrant under most policy regimes is minimum oral and written second language acquisition. Moreover, in the absence of economic incentives, government compulsion to acquire a second language does not induce second language acquisition but increases the incentives for return migration or leads to cultural and labour segmentation. The acquisition of different degrees of second language skills is a function of the immigrant's occupation or skill level upon arrival. Unskilled workers, perhaps females, will never move further than minimum oral skills. However, both the skilled and professionally trained immigrants, subject to the availability of sufficient financing, will improve their language skills since they have an economic incentive to reach, respectively, equilibrium B for skilled workers, which means good oral and written or equilibrium H for professionals, excellent oral and written skills. In the absence of a subsidy, those immigrants who arrive with minimum oral skills will never obtain language skills beyond the minimum oral level, as professors Don DeVoretz and Christiane Werner mentioned in their study *A Theory of Social Forces and Immigrant Second Language Acquisition*. In sum, in the labour market, individuals will acquire different language capabilities given their skill endowment, initial language abilities and financing schemes.

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<sup>11</sup>Goudenhoofd, Gabriela, *Diaspora is going online. Identity, language and digital communication*, in Journal of Romanian Literary Studies, volume 6, 2015, p. 154

<sup>12</sup>Johanna Olkinuora-Guzmán, Master thesis *Interpersonal Relationships of Immigrant Students*, University of Jyväskylä, Department of Communication, p.3 on <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/37057/URN:NBN:fi:jyu-2011120911778.pdf?sequence=1>

The educational sector often mandates second language acquisition by immigrant children as a prerequisite for further education. Thus, second language acquisition often occurs in an immersion environment and initially dominates the immigrant's school experience.

A central theme in SLA (second language acquisition) research is that of *interlanguage*, the idea that the language that learners use is not simply the result of differences between the languages that they already know and the language that they are learning, but that it is a complete language system in its own right, with its own systematic rules. This interlanguage gradually develops as learners are exposed to the targeted language.

The order in which learners acquire features of their new language stays remarkably constant, even for learners with different native languages, and regardless of whether they have had language instruction. However, languages that learners already know can have a significant influence on the process of learning a new one. This influence is known as *language transfer*. Second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person's first language. Although the concept is named *second-language* acquisition, it can also incorporate the learning of third, fourth or subsequent languages<sup>13</sup>.

Ellis Rod, a PhD professor at Anaheim University, characterized SLA research as a rather amorphous field of study with elastic boundaries<sup>14</sup>. Scholars disagree on how far the boundaries extend, and thus on how to define the scope, nature and research aims of inquiries within the field. Over the years, social and cultural perspectives have developed to replace or supplement linguistic approaches to SLA. These have generated further points of contention and further debates about the role of the native speaker as the benchmark for ultimate linguistic attainment, the impact of language on the construction of identity, native versus non-native speaker norms, standard versus non-standard varieties and so forth<sup>15</sup>.

With regard to communication and its role, two positions can be discerned in this perspective. Most research conducted within the generative tradition has typically been unconcerned with the issue of communication, here the main focus of inquiry has been on internal, mental processes. Communication is seen to contribute little to language acquisition, except, perhaps, as a source of linguistic input. Thus, professor Stephen Krashen, a professor emeritus at the University of Southern California, who developed one of the most widely followed second or foreign language teaching methodologies, argued that the necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition is the exposure to comprehensible input<sup>16</sup>. *Comprehensible input* is defined as input that is a little beyond the learner's present level. Krashen defined the present level as I and the ideal level of input as I +1.

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<sup>13</sup> Gass, Susan, Selinker, Larry, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2008, p. 68

<sup>14</sup> Ellis R., *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.12

<sup>15</sup> Kramsch C., *The privilege of the nonnative speaker*, PMLA, 1997, p.112

<sup>16</sup> Krashen Stephen, *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*, London: Longman, 1985, p.26

Much of professor's Krashen recent research having involved the study of non-English and bilingual language acquisition, argues that language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules and does not require tedious drill.

Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language, natural communication, in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. The best methods are therefore those that supply comprehensible input, term we have already mentioned, in low anxiety situations, containing messages that learners really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow those who learn a second language to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful<sup>17</sup>.

Merrill Swain, working as a professor emerita of second-language education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, challenged this view with her focus on the role of *comprehensible output*, suggesting that learners need to be pushed to make use of their recourses; they need to have their linguistic abilities stretched to their fullest; they need to reflect on their output and consider ways of modifying it to enhance comprehensibility, appropriateness, and accuracy<sup>18</sup>. Here communication is seen not merely as a source of linguistic input, but also as a tool to facilitate language acquisition.

### **Misapprehension about second language learning**

We will focus here on immigrant teenagers intending to speak English as their second language. Obviously, people come to the EU countries for a multitude of different reasons. For some the move may be a desirable event, but for almost everyone it will also involve painful, lonely and difficult moments and mainly efforts in learning a second language. Many things that one has taken for granted until now are gone. This is just as true for children and young people as it is for adults. In order to create quality educational opportunities for students, teachers and other school personnel need to honestly assess their perceptions and attitudes about the experiences of learning another language and adapting to a new culture.

Skilled educators working with second language learners from diverse cultures pay attention to the research and writings of prominent scholars in the field of second language education, linguistics and multicultural education. Accurate information from reliable sources combined with classroom-based research should form the basis for intelligent educational programs that are responsive to the unique needs of ESL learners.

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<sup>17</sup> Krashen, Stephen , *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Prentice-Hall International, 1987, p.113

<sup>18</sup> Swain, M., *The output hypothesis: Just speaking and writing aren't enough*, *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 1993, pp. 160-161

Some participants to a conference on multicultural education developed a working definition of multicultural education: "Education that is multicultural is a dynamic and life-long process of teaching and learning that fosters critical thinking, cultural awareness, language proficiency, cooperation, self-esteem, community concern, and transformative social action".

Multiculturalism does not mean assimilation of minorities or their tolerance, but openness to otherness, toward the other and taking into consideration differences and diversity, as richness. Multiculturalism also requires a thinking of identity and should help to build a European identity, where each newcomer should be able to commit himself. Integration of immigrants in the host society institutions is a long process relying on an intergeneration issue<sup>19</sup>.

One of the main concerns of educating immigrants in English native speakers' countries has been seen, for a long time, as the effective teaching of English as a second language, which generally, in the thinking of many, should take place as fast as possible. However, although language development is part of the purpose of any schooling, whether it takes place in the family language or in a second language, its focus and form change as students develop. While in the lower elementary grades students primarily learn to read and write (in addition to being socialized into the culture of the school), in the higher grades students increasingly read and write to learn. Cognitive and academic development are central to the notion of schooling at that level, and the role of language development shifts to support these other aspects of development<sup>20</sup>.

Teaching immigrant adolescents to successfully speak English as a second language alone is not sufficient to enable them to succeed in English language speaking countries in middle and high schools, where they will be required to perform at sophisticated levels of cognition and in subject-specific areas. If a narrow focus is placed on the linguistic development of English, immigrant students will not be able to catch up academically to their native counterparts<sup>21</sup>, as Virginia P. Collier, a professor emerita of bilingual and multicultural education at George Mason University in Virginia points out. Native English-speaking students do not wait for second language learners to achieve their academic level, they themselves are continuously expanding their linguistic and cognitive command in English. The future success of English learners, paradoxically, depends on much more than learning English, involving the crucial ability to use the central concepts, canons, and discourse that is associated with different disciplines.

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<sup>19</sup> Matiuța, Cristina, *Identity and Multiculturalism in the European Union*, in vol. *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue*, ARHIPELAG Publishing House, XXI, 2013, p. 35

<sup>20</sup> Walcui, Aida, *Access and Engagement. Program design and instructional approaches for immigrant students in secondary schools*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, ERIC Publications, 2000, p. 25

<sup>21</sup> Collier P. Virginia, *Promoting academic success for ESL students: Understanding second language acquisition for school*, Woodside, Bastos Educational Publications, NY: New Jersey, 1995, p.88



Courtney Cazden, educated at Harvard University and interested in the development of oral and written abilities and in the functions of language in school and community assumes that it is sometimes noticed in schools that a student's ability in everyday oral communication is a valid measure of his or her competence to use language in a wide variety of settings, including demanding academic work<sup>22</sup>. However, gaps exist between every day and academic language use, for first-language as well as second-language speakers. These gaps occur between school demands and social experiences and include differences in school-based and home-based value systems, goals, and experiential sources of knowledge. Such gaps between home and school can lead to difficulties with providing English language learners with access to academic content, unless a great deal of instructional and linguistic support is provided<sup>23</sup>.

Relying on this misconception, immigrant students are promoted from ESL classes into mainstream classes, conducted exclusively in English, on the basis of their conversational ability alone and are not given any support, academic or linguistic. As a result, these students often lag behind their native English speaking counterparts in academic progress.

James Cummins (1979), professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto where he works on language development and literacy development of learners of English as an additional language, has indicated that there may actually be two dimensions of communicative competence, what he has called Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the ability a person has to use a second language in face-to-face situations, when the repair of breakdowns in communication is easily negotiable and CALP refers to the ability to use the second language appropriately in situations in which the content is decontextualized and cognitively demanding<sup>24</sup>.

There is a series of aspects related to both the immigrant students' first and second languages which frame language learning, including the linguistic "route" between the two languages, the students' proficiency in the native language and prior knowledge of the second language, whether the native language is a non-standard or standard dialect, the status of its speakers and sociolinguistic attitudes.

Concluding all these, one may assert that there are many perspectives on second language learning and understanding the complex phenomena of language learning which is so central to our thoughts and social relationships which cannot be reduced to a simple transmission of facts and automated skills.

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<sup>22</sup> Cazden, Courtney, *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning*, 1988, accessed on <https://web.stanford.edu/~hakuta/www/archives/syllabi/Docs/Walqui1.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Tharp, R. G. & Gallimore, R., *The redefinition of teaching and schooling*, in **Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning and schooling in social context**, Cambridge University, 1988, p. 22

<sup>24</sup> James Cummins, Eunice Jang., Margaret Early, *Literacy Attainment among Newcomer Students*, Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2008, p. 17

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