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Media Use and Acculturation of New Immigrants in the United States

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Data from Princeton University's New Immigrant Survey were analyzed to examine the associations between immigrants' media use and 3 indicators of acculturation—current English proficiency, preference to use English in interactions, and American political knowledge. Findings show that pre-immigration uses of English language TV, radio, and print media and post-immigration use of English language print media were associated with higher current English proficiency. Pre-immigration use of native language print media and post-immigration uses of English language TV, radio, and print media were positively associated with a current preference to use English in interactions. Post-immigration use of native language print media was inversely associated with a preference to use English. Furthermore, post-immigration uses of native language radio and print media were positively associated with current American political knowledge. The findings imply that it is an oversimplification to assume that native language media hinders acculturation.

Keywords: Acculturation; Immigrants; Media Effects

Population statistics continue to show an increase in the numbers of immigrants entering the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). These residents undergo a process of acculturation, and during this process, many of them turn to the media to learn about their new cultural environment (Choi & Tamborini, 1988; Johnson, 1996; Kim, 1978; Lin, Song, & Ball-Rokeach, 2010; Moon & Park, 2007; Stilling, 1997; Subervi-Velez, 1986; Tan, 1983). The purpose of this study is to analyze immigrants' pre- and post-immigration uses of English and native language media and how such uses are associated with three indicators of acculturation—current English proficiency, preference to use English in social interactions, and American political

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knowledge. Previous research has linked both lower levels of English proficiency (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004) and lower English use in social interactions (Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2002) with higher incidences of acculturative stress. In addition, studies have shown that lower English proficiency is associated with lower wages (Chiswick & Miller, 1999) and lower occupational success (Shields & Price, 2002). In the political realm, immigrants' chances to gain a ''voice'' in their new country's political decision-making are predicated on the extent to which they are able to acquire knowledge of their new country's politics (e.g., White, Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil, & Fournier, 2008). Thus, this study is important because it examines whether uses of certain media promote or hinder immigrants' acquisition of English language proficiencies, use of English, and knowledge of American politics. Previous research examining immigrants' uses of media during the acculturation process have typically relied on convenience samples of immigrants originating from a single country, or probability-based samples of immigrants living in a single geographical area of the United States. Previous studies have also paid less attention to analyzing the relationships between pre-immigration media use and indicators of acculturation. The strength and unique contribution of this study is its use of a nationally representative sample of more than 4,300 new immigrants, who originate from over 30 countries, and its analyses of the effects of pre- and post-immigration uses of media.

Hypothesis and Research Question

Current models of acculturation suggest that it is a complex and multidimensional process in which immigrants retain aspects of their native culture while they acquire the host society's culture through adopting its attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors (e.g., Stephenson, 2000; Trimble, 2003). This perspective is distinguished from assimilation, which assumes that immigrants discard their native culture when they adopt their host society's culture. Current models of acculturation can also be aligned with the notion of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Kraidy, 2002), which implies that immigrants' cultural identity is fluid and undergoes a continuous and dynamic process of formation. In other words, the process of cultural identity formation among immigrants involves a constant balance between holding on to their native country's culture and the simultaneous adoption of foreign customs for the purpose of surviving in their new country (Dutta-Bergman & Pal, 2005; Young, 2009).

American psychologists have long utilized English proficiency (e.g., Chung, Kim, & Abreu, 2004; Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980) and preference to use English in interactions (e.g., S.-M. Kang, 2006; Stephenson, 2000) as indicators of acculturation to American society. In the field of communication, scholars have also adopted American political knowledge as a measure of acculturation (Chaffee, Nass, & Yang, 1991; Tan, 1983). The common assumption is that higher levels of English proficiency, greater preference to use English in interactions, and greater American political knowledge indicate greater acculturation to American society.

Communication serves as a primary vehicle through which immigrants become acculturated to a new social environment (Gudykunst, 2001; Kim, 1977; Tan, 1983;

Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). Kim (1977, 1988) postulated that immigrants' accessibility to American media and acculturation motivation predicts their exposure to American media. Research supports these propositions, establishing media use as an indicator of acculturation (Jeffres, 2000; Moon & Park, 2007; Shoemaker, Reese, & Danielson, 1985; Subervi-Velez, 1986; Tan, 1983). Shoemaker et al., for instance, suggested that the use of English language media indicates greater acculturation to American society.

Kim (1977, 1988) also postulated that immigrants' exposure to American media predicts their acquisition of American culture. This is supported by a number of studies, which have been based on Bandura's (1978) perspective on social learning. Stilling (1997) showed that Hispanic immigrants' use of English language TV as a cultural resource is associated with higher levels of acculturation. Johnson (1996) revealed that Hispanic immigrants are motivated to use American TV for the purpose of learning English, and this use reduces their acculturative stress. Chaffee et al. (1990) showed that Korean immigrants are able to acquire knowledge of American politicians through the use of U.S. newspapers and TV. Moon and Park (2007) found that Korean immigrants are able to learn American cultural values through their use of American media.

Researchers have recently emphasized the need to examine the roles played by immigrants' uses of both native and host media in the acculturation process (e.g., Croucher, Oommen, & Steele, 2009; Lin et al., 2010; Moon & Park, 2007; Shumow, 2010). Because the use of English language media could serve as an indicator of acculturation to American society (e.g., Shoemaker et al., 1985), it is likely that new immigrants' pre- and post-immigration uses of English language media are positively associated with English proficiencies, preference to use English in interactions, and American political knowledge, which also serve as acculturation indicators. Moreover, if the use of English language media could facilitate greater acculturation, a corollary question is whether the use of native language media is inversely associated with acculturation indicators. On one hand, it is plausible that foreign media can influence foreigners to adopt aspects of American culture (e.g., Elasmar & Hunter, 1993; J. G. Kang, 1992), and ethnic media in the United States may also play a social role of assimilating immigrants to American society (Viswanath & Arora, 2000). On the other hand, there is the potential that native media can influence foreigners to resist American stances (e.g., DeFleur & DeFleur, 2003). Native media might also play a role in reinforcing immigrants' native cultures (e.g., Moon & Park, 2007). Indeed, Kraidy and Murphy's (2008) concept of "translocalism," as applied to global communication studies, implies that local media of foreign countries could simultaneously accommodate and resist aspects of American culture. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether the use of native language media facilitates greater or lesser adoption of American culture.

Based on the previously reviewed literature, the following hypothesis is tested, and the research question is investigated:

> H1: *Pre- and post-immigration uses of English language media are positively associated with current (a) English proficiency, (b) preference to use English in interactions, and (c) American political knowledge.*

RQ1: How are pre- and post-immigration uses of native language media associated with current (a) English proficiency, (b) preference to use English in interactions, and (c) American political knowledge?

Method

Procedure and Sample

Data were acquired from Princeton University's New Immigrant Survey conducted by Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, and Smith (2003). The survey was comprised of 8,573 personal, face-to-face interviews, with a response rate of about 70%. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred languages and within a 7-month period between May 2003 through November 2003. The geographical sampling frame for the survey included the top 85 metropolitan statistical areas and all of the top 38 counties in the United States. The sample was comprised of new arrival immigrants (i.e., those who had recently arrived to the United States with immigrant documents acquired in foreign countries) and adjustee immigrants (i.e., those who were already living in the United States with a nonimmigrant visa or those who were living in the United States illegally, but eventually adjusted to lawful permanent residence). Immigrants from over 30 countries were represented in the survey, and a majority reported that they were born in Mexico, Europe, Central Asia, and India. Immigrants who originated from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Jamaica were not included in this study's analyses under the assumption that they were likely to already be proficient in English. Respondents in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, could not be identified. For this reason, and because it was also likely that some respondents may have already had a mastery of English (e.g., those originating from India), which could potentially affect this study's analyses, those who reported speaking English as their only language were not included in the analyses. Respondents were randomized into five subgroups, and asked questions regarding their uses of specific types of media. This study analyzed data from three of the subgroups, and after excluding the respondents who were assumed to be proficient in English, this left a final sample size of 4,356. One of these subgroups was asked how often they watched TV ($n = 1,465$), a second subgroup was asked how often they listened to radio ($n = 1,400$), and a third subgroup was asked how often they read newspapers and magazines (henceforth referred to as the *print media subgroup*; $n = 1,491$). The mean age was roughly 30 years, and the age range was between 18 to 84 years.

Measures

Pre- and post-immigration uses of English and native language media. This study analyzed data from respondents in the TV use, radio use, and print media use subgroups. These respondents were asked how often they used their respective English and native language medium (TV, radio, or print) and its corresponding native language medium each week in the 1 year prior to leaving their countries of origin. These items served as measures of pre-immigration media use. Respondents were also

asked how often they used the same medium each week as a permanent resident in the United States. These items served as measures of post-immigration media use. Uses of TV and radio were measured by hours per week. Use of print media and radio were measured along a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*less than once a week*), 3 (*once a week*), 4 (*a few times a week*), to 5 (*every day*). The means and standard deviations for pre- and post-immigration uses of English and native language media are reported in Table 1.

English proficiency. Two items measured current English proficiency, and response options for both ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very well*): ''How well would you say you understand English when someone is speaking to you?,'' and ''How well would you say you speak English?'' These items were combined to form a single index.[1]

Preference to use English in interactions. Three items measured the current preference to use English in interactions: (a) ''What languages do you currently speak at home?,'' (b) ''What languages have you spoken outside of your home while at work in the United States in the past twelve months?,'' and (c) ''What languages do you speak outside of your home when you are with friends?'' Responses were scored as 1 if respondents reported speaking English and 0 if they did not. Responses to these items were summed and combined to form a single index.[2]

Table 1   Means and Standard Deviations for Pre- and Post-Immigration Uses of English Language and Native Language Media of New U.S. Immigrants

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Pre-immigration uses of English language media		
English language TV	4.77	8.45
English language radio	3.41	11.00
English language print media	2.23	1.58
Post-immigration uses of English language media		
English language TV	8.73	10.27
English language radio	5.70	9.71
English language print media	2.97	1.66
Pre-immigration uses of native language media		
Native language TV	5.96	8.64
Native language radio	5.21	9.21
Native language print media	3.44	1.60
Post-immigration uses of native language media		
Native language TV	3.24	7.64
Native language radio	2.50	7.84
Native language print media	2.51	1.51

Note. Means and standard deviations for uses of TV are reported in hours per week. Means and standard deviations for uses of radio and print media are reported along a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*less than once a week*), 3 (*once a week*), 4 (*a few times a week*), to 5 (*every day*).

American political knowledge. Current American political knowledge was measured by asking respondents whether they knew the name of the person who held the following positions: (a) president of the United States, (b) secretary of state, (c) chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, (d) and speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Responses to these items were coded so that 1 = *correct answer* and 0 = *incorrect, refusal,* or *don't know.* Responses to the four items were summed and combined to form a single index.[3]

Controls. Control variables for the regression analyses included age, gender, education, a dichotomous item measuring whether English was spoken at home during childhood, and a dichotomous item measuring whether respondents took classes taught in English in the United States. Where appropriate, English proficiency and preference to use English in interactions were added as controls in the regression models.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

T tests showed significant differences between the means for pre- and post-immigration uses of English language media. Results in Table 1 show that

Table 2 Regression Results (Standardized Coefficients) for Uses of TV and Associations With Current English Proficiency, Preference to Use English in Interactions, and American Political Knowledge of New Immigrants

Variable	English proficiency	Preference to use English in interactions	American political knowledge
Controls			
Age	.11***	.07**	−.05*
Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	−.02	−.04*	−.19***
Education (in years)	.25***	.06*	.24***
Took classes taught in English in the United States	.09***	.03	.02
Use of English during childhood	.03[†]	.06**	.01
English proficiency	—	.65***	.18***
Use of English in interactions	.56***	—	.03
Incremental R^2	.62***	.56***	.17***
Use of TV			
Pre-immigration use of English language TV	.07***	.01	.02
Pre-immigration use of native language TV	−.03[†]	−.01	.01
Post-immigration use of English language TV	.01	.07**	.01
Post-immigration use of native language TV	−.01	−.03	.01
Incremental R^2	.01***	.01***	.00

Note. N = 1,465. All values are betas unless otherwise noted.
***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05, †p < .10.

pre-immigration use of English language TV averaged 4.77 hr ($SD = 8.45$ hr) weekly, and use of English language radio averaged 3.41 hr ($SD = 11.00$ hr) weekly. As can be expected, post-immigration use of English language TV increased to an average of 8.73 hr ($SD = 10.27$ hr) weekly, and use of English language radio increased to an average of 5.70 hr ($SD = 9.71$ hr) weekly. Respondents reported using English language print media more frequently during post-immigration ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.66$) than pre-immigration ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.58$).

   T tests also showed significant differences between the means for pre- and post-immigration uses of native language media. Results in Table 1 show that pre-immigration use of native language TV averaged 5.96 hr ($SD = 8.64$ hr) weekly, and pre-immigration use of native language radio averaged 5.21 hr ($SD = 9.21$ hr) weekly. As can also be expected, post-immigration use of native language TV dropped to an average of 3.24 hr ($SD = 7.64$ hr) weekly, and post-immigration use of native language radio dropped to an average of 2.50 hr ($SD = 7.84$ hr) weekly. Respondents also used native language print media less frequently during post-immigration ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.51$) than pre-immigration ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.60$).

Table 3   Regression Results (Standardized Coefficients) for Uses of Radio and Associations With Current English Proficiency, Preference to Use English in Interactions, and American Political Knowledge of New Immigrants

Variable	English proficiency	Preference to use English in interactions	American political knowledge
Controls			
Age	.11***	.03	−.08**
Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	−.03†	−.01*	.22***
Education (in years)	.28***	.03	.15***
Took classes taught in English in the United States	.09***	.01	.01
Use of English during childhood	.04*	.06**	.06*
English proficiency	—	.68***	.22*
Use of English in interactions	.07**	—	.01
Incremental R^2 (%)	.65***	.56***	.18***
Use of radio			
Pre-immigration use of English language radio	.07**	.02	.03
Pre-immigration use of native language radio	−.02	.01	−.02
Post-immigration use of English language radio	.04†	.06**	.01
Post-immigration use of native language radio	−.03†	−.01	.07*
Incremental R^2	.01***	.01***	.01*

Note. $N = 1,400$. All values are betas unless otherwise noted.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, †$p < .10$.

Results for H1 and RQ1

H1 predicted that pre- and post-immigration uses of English language media are positively associated with current (a) English proficiency, (b) preference to use English in interactions, and (c) American political knowledge. Because respondents were randomized into subgroups and administered questions that respectively measured their uses of radio, TV, and print media, separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were employed to test *H1*. Listwise deletion was used to deal with missing data, and levels for tolerance and the variance inflation factor indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem in any of the regression models. Results for *H1* are shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Significant predictors of current English proficiency include pre-immigration uses of English language TV ($\beta = .07$), radio ($\beta = .07$), and print media ($\beta = .15$), and post-immigration use of English language print media ($\beta = .20$). Significant predictors of a current preference to use English in interactions include post-immigration uses of English language TV ($\beta = .07$), radio ($\beta = .06$), and print media ($\beta = .17$). Uses of English language media did not predict current American political knowledge. These results provide some support for *H1*.

RQ1 asked, "How are pre- and post-immigration uses of native language media associated with current (a) English proficiency, (b) preference to use English in

Table 4 Regression Results (Standardized Coefficients) for Uses of Print Media and Associations With Current English Proficiency, Preference to Use English in Interactions, and American Political Knowledge of New Immigrants

Variable	English proficiency	Preference to use English in interactions	American political knowledge
Controls			
Age	.13***	.05*	.02
Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	−.03†	−.02	−.16***
Education (in years)	.18***	.02	.14***
Took classes taught in English in the United States	.09	.01	−.04
Use of English during childhood	.05**	.05*	.00
English proficiency	—	.57***	.27***
Use of English in interactions	.42***	—	.00
Incremental R^2	.64***	.56***	.19***
Use of print media			
Pre-immigration use of English language print media	.15***	.03	.06†
Pre-immigration use of native language print media	−.05**	.04*	.03
Post-immigration use of English language print media	.20***	.17***	−.03
Post-immigration use of native language print media	−.01	−.08***	.07**
Incremental R^2	.05***	.02***	.01**

Note. $N = 1,491$. All values are betas unless otherwise noted.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, †$p < .10$.

interactions, and (c) American political knowledge?'' Results show that pre-immigration use of native language print media ($\beta = -.05$) was inversely associated with current English proficiency. It is interesting to note that pre-immigration use of native language print media ($\beta = .04$) was positively associated, and post-immigration use of native language print media ($\beta = -.10$) was inversely associated, with a current preference to use English in interactions. Furthermore, post-immigration uses of native language radio ($\beta = .07$) and print media ($\beta = .07$) were positively associated with current American political knowledge. No other significant associations were found between uses of the other native language media and the acculturation indicators. These results paint a mixed picture for the role of native language media use during the acculturation process.

Discussion

Previous research (e.g., Kim, 1978; Shoemaker et al., 1985; Subervi-Velez, 1984) has established that as immigrants become acculturated to a host society, their uses of host media increase while their uses of native media decrease. This study corroborates these findings. Specifically, descriptive results show that immigrants used English language media more frequently in the United States than in their countries of origin. Descriptive results also show that immigrants used native language media less frequently in the United States than in their countries of origin.

   This study also examined whether immigrants' uses of English language media are associated with higher English proficiency and greater use of English in interactions. As the results show, pre-immigration uses of English language TV, radio, and print media, and post-immigration use of English language print media were associated with higher English proficiency. Among other things, these findings suggest that pre-immigration use of English language media plays a key role in facilitating the acquisition of current English proficiency. As Johnson (1996) found, immigrants are motivated to use American TV to learn English, and this reduces their acculturative stress. Similarly, the results of this study may be explained by the likelihood that some immigrants may be using English language media prior to immigration for the purpose of learning English. Results also showed that post-immigration uses of English language TV, radio, and print media are positively associated with a preference to use English in interactions. These findings reinforce the expectation that during acculturation, increases in the uses of English language media are accompanied with increases in the preferences to use English in interactions.

   This study also explored the associations between the use of native language media and acculturation indicators. The regression coefficients provide mixed findings for the role of native language media use during the acculturation process. Uses of native language TV and radio did not affect English proficiency and preference to use English in interactions. Pre-immigration use of native language print media was inversely associated with current English proficiency. Post-immigration use of native language print media was inversely associated with a current preference to use English in interactions. It is interesting to note, however, that pre-immigration use of native language

print media was positively associated with a current preference to use English in interactions. A similar pattern emerged for post-immigration uses of native language radio and print media, which were both positively associated with current American political knowledge. These findings imply that it is an oversimplification to assume that native language media hinders the acculturation process. Uses of such media may be useful for immigrants as they gradually undergo their acculturation to American society. Therefore, it may not be a fair assessment to conclude that use of native language media hinders the acculturation process.

This study suggests that immigrants appropriate English language media, both in their countries of origin and in the United States, to learn about American culture. Simultaneously, immigrants appropriate native language media, both in their countries of origin and in the United States, to maintain their native culture and learn about American culture. These findings challenge the notion of assimilation, which implies that immigrants discard their use of native language media as they adopt the use of their host society's media. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the current understanding of acculturation as being a complex and multidimensional process (e.g., Trimble, 2003). The findings also reflect the nature of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Kraidy, 2002), which suggests that immigrants' cultural identities are fluid and undergo a continuous and dynamic process of formation, involving a balance of holding on to aspects of their native culture while simultaneously adopting foreign customs to survive in a new country (e.g., Dutta-Bergman & Pal, 2005; Young, 2009). Future research should, thus, acknowledge that the multidimensional and dynamic nature of immigrants' identities is reflected in their uses of English and native language media, and that the ''fluid'' nature of immigrants' identities impacts the extent to which their uses of media affects their acculturation to a new country.

An intriguing finding of this study is that native language media use is positively linked with acculturation indicators. This finding reinforces the assumptions that foreign media (e.g., Elasmer & Hunter, 1993; J. G. Kang, 1992) and ethnic media in the United States (Viswanath & Arora, 2000) can influence immigrants to adopt aspects of American culture while simultaneously reinforcing immigrants' native cultures (Moon & Park, 2007). This finding might also be explained by the notion of translocalism (Kraidy & Murphy, 2008), which implies that native media simultaneously accommodate and resist American stances. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the effects of native language media on acculturation indicators will be mixed. Given the nature of translocalism, future research could examine how this concept can be used to explain the potentially differing content of native language media and the likelihood that such differing content affects the acculturation process for immigrants. In particular, it would be interesting to explore the ways in which immigrants appropriate native language media to simultaneously accommodate and resist American culture, as well as the psychological processes that may motivate such appropriations.

Some limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the survey's design randomized and split the respondents into separate subgroups, and each subgroup

was administered a particular set of media use questions. Due to this design, it was not possible to analyze the combined effects of all three of the media sources along a single regression model. Future studies could, thus, consider measuring the uses of these media and including measures for uses of all other media in a single question-naire. Second, it could not be determined whether responses to self-reported English proficiency and preference to use English were being influenced by social desirability. However, this potential limitation could be tempered by the fact that a number of validated and established instruments designed to measure acculturation (e.g., Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Stephenson, 2000) also rely on self-reports to measure English proficiency and language use preferences. Finally, more recent acculturation-related research has focused on the impact of communication on cultural values (Moon & Park, 2007) and civic engagement (Wilkin et al. 2009). Future studies are, thus, warranted to examine the impact of English and native language media use on such variables.

Notes

[1]   Means and standard deviations of the English proficiency index for each of the three subgroups are as follows: TV subgroup ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.99$), radio subgroup ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.02$), and print media subgroup ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.02$).

[2]   Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of preference to use English in interactions index for each of the subgroups are as follows: TV subgroup ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.18$; $\alpha = .72$), radio subgroup ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.17$; $\alpha = .71$), and print media subgroup ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.21$; $\alpha = .73$).

[3]   Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of the American political knowledge index for each of the subgroups are as follows: TV subgroup ($M = 1.43$, $SD = 1.18$; $\alpha = .42$), radio subgroup ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.74$; $\alpha = .40$), and print media subgroup ($M = 1.43$, $SD = 0.77$; $\alpha = .44$). Although the alpha scores for the American political knowledge index are not ideal, political communication scholars point out that it is not uncommon for measures of political knowledge to yield alpha scores below .70 (e.g., Eveland & Hively, 2009).

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