

# THE CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN ROMANIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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**Abstract:** *An overview is presented of issues relevant for cross-cultural research in Romanian psychology. It is first observed that Romania is not well presented in large-scale cross-cultural studies such as studies on (work-related) values and that the scarce data do not present a consistent picture. The paper then continues by presenting relevant topics for the fledgling cross-cultural research in psychology in Romania. The first is the need to go beyond the emic—etic dichotomy; the second is the seemingly ubiquitous presence of response styles in self-reports in cross-cultural studies; the third refers to acculturation psychology. It is concluded that cross-cultural psychology is relevant for three domains in cross-cultural psychology in Romania: the place of Romania in the psychological map of the world, Romanians in the Diaspora, and diversity (multiculturalism) within Romania.*

**Key words:** *Romania, cross-cultural research, acculturation, multiculturalism*

## 1. Introduction

There seems to be an increase in interest in cross-cultural issues in Romanian psychology. This development is encouraging as Romania is not well presented in the extant cross-cultural literature. An exception can be found in large-scale studies of work values, the most of which include Romanian samples. Three of such studies are briefly discussed here.

The first is the widely quoted study by Hofstede (1980, 2001; see [www.geerthofstede.com](http://www.geerthofstede.com)). He argues that differences in work-related values across countries can be described using four dimensions (later publications in which more dimensions were discussed are not presented here): (1) Power Distance, indicating the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally; (2) Uncertainty Avoidance, referring to the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations (presence of and compliance with strict laws and rules, safety and security measures); (3) Individualism (vs. Collectivism), involving the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups; (4) Masculinity (vs. Femininity), referring to assertiveness versus caring, but also to gender role overlap. Romania scores high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, rather low on masculinity, and low on

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individualism.

The second study is the so-called World Values Survey (Inglehart, 1997). Based on probability samples in many countries, he argues that values across the globe can be described using two dimensions: (1) Rational-Legal (vs. Traditional Authority), associated with achievement motivation, determination, and interest in politics; (2) Well-being (vs. Survival), characterized by a priority on self-expression and quality of life, happiness and well-being. Romania scores near the midpoint on the authority dimension and very high on survival.

The third study has been conducted by Schwartz (1982) and also describes country differences in human values, including harmony, embeddedness, hierarchy, mastery, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, and egalitarianism. He found that his Romanian samples did not differ from the global mean on most of the values, with the exception of hierarchy (where Romania scores lower than the world average) and intellectual autonomy (where Romania has higher scores).

It can be concluded from these studies that the global picture about Romania is rather sketchy and inconsistent. The inconsistent findings regarding power distance and hierarchies are a striking example. Different reasons could be envisaged for the discrepancies, including differences in sampling frames of the studies (only the World Values Survey used probability sampling). Another reason could well be that these studies did not tend to pay much attention to methodological issues such as the question of whether instruments measure the same across all countries and scores can be compared across countries (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

Such an inconclusive picture is indicative of a country where not many comparative studies have been conducted. It would be very helpful if more cross-cultural studies will be conducted in the future in Romania. In the remainder three topics are described that could be relevant in these studies. No reference is made to the methodological literature as it has been described elsewhere in great detail (e.g., Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The themes that are described below are: (1) the need to go beyond the emic—etic dichotomy; (2) the seemingly ubiquitous presence of response styles in self-reports in cross-cultural studies; (3) topics in acculturation psychology.

## **2. Three Current Themes in Cross-Cultural Psychology**

### **2.1. Emic—Etic Dilemma**

The field of cross-cultural psychology has not been without controversies. The probably best known controversy that has been around for a long time refers to the emic—etic dilemma (Pike, 1967). The issue refers to the question of how to study cultures in cross-cultural psychology. On the one hand, in the emic tradition there is the idea that cultures should be “studied from within”, which means that cultures can be best studied using indigenous concepts (and, in some cases, methods). This method of studying cultures is popular in ethnography and cultural anthropology. For example, when designing an intelligence test, an indigenous approach would begin with local surveys as to what constitutes intelligence in a specific cultural context (Serpell, 1993). Local conceptualizations can be identified by asking locals to list characteristics associated with intelligence. In an etic approach, on the other hand, there is more emphasis on culture-comparative work and on using a common set of concepts and methods. A good example

is a study in which an established intelligence test is administered in different countries and results are compared (e.g., Georgas, Weiss, Van de Vijver, & Saklofske, 2003).

A good example of the rift between emic and etic approaches can be found in the field of personality. The etic approach has dominated this field. Many studies have addressed the universality of the Five-Factor Model of personality. In these studies, a Western instrument, purportedly measuring all important aspects of personality, is administered in multiple cultures and data are compared by examining the similarity of exploratory factor analysis structures (Allik & McCrae, 2002). These studies have been successful in showing that the basic structure of personality is universal (i.e., factors tend to be identical across countries). However, emic studies of personality have also been conducted. In the studies there is much more emphasis on the identification of culturally specific aspects of personality. Examples are studies of *amae* (indulgent dependency in Japan; Doi, 1973), *cheong* (group-related affect in Korea; Choi & Choi, 2001), *renqing* (relational orientation in China; Zhang & Bond, 1998), and the selfless self (India; Mosig, 2006).

Emic and etic approaches have long been taken to be mutually incompatible. However, in the last decade there is growing appreciation that the two approaches reflect different and complementary aspects of cross-cultural comparisons (Cheung, Van de Vijver, & Leong, 2011; see also Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011). The study of personality can again be used as an illustration. Extroversion is universal to the best of our knowledge and has been identified in both etic and emic personality studies. However, specific indicators of extroversion may be culture specific. For example, cultures differ in when children are allowed to talk to parents in the presence of strangers. An item about this topic may reflect extroversion in Western cultures where children are usually allowed to speak in the presence of strangers also when they were not asked to speak; however, in many other cultures children are only allowed to speak when parents give permission. An item about this topic cannot be used in a culture comparative study due to these differential norms.

Emic and etic approaches are now seen as complementary and that one of the central tasks in cross-cultural psychology is indeed to identify both universal and culture-specific aspects of psychological functioning. The emic—etic discussion has implications for test adaptations. It is common practice in the preparation of test translations nowadays to examine whether items are appropriate for the new cultural context (Hambleton, 1994; Hambleton, Merenda, & Spielberger, 2005; see also the ITC website at [www.intestcom.org](http://www.intestcom.org) for a description of test adaptation guidelines). If not, local adaptations needed so as to maximize suitability of the tested instrument in the new cultural context.

## **2.2. Response Styles**

Self-reports are widely used in psychological research and clinical assessment. Yet, this way of assessment is not without problems. Self-reports are susceptible to biases; response styles are the most frequently mentioned. Response styles are defined as the systematic tendency to use certain categories of an answering scale on some basis other than the target construct (Cronbach, 1950; He & Van de Vijver, in press). Many response styles have been described in the literature. The most frequently studied response styles include acquiescent response style (ARS), extreme response style (ERS), midpoint

response style (MRS), and socially desirable response style (SDR) (Paulhus, 1991). Response styles are often studied in Likert scales. A score on ARS is then operationalized as the proportion of agree responses in a set of items, preferably assessing multiple independent constructs. Analogously, extreme and midpoint responding are operationalized as the proportion of extreme and midpoint scores in large sets of items. Different sets of items should be used to measure each of the three response styles to avoid any dependencies in the data. For the measurement of social desirability it is needed to administer a dedicated instrument, such as the Marlowe Crowne Scale of Social Desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). There is not much work in which different response styles are integrated. This paucity is remarkable as these styles can be assumed to be correlated; for example, individuals who tend to prefer midpoint responses are unlikely to choose extreme responses. When all response styles are examined together, a clear pattern emerges: the four response styles load on a single underlying factor, called the General Response Style (GRS) (He & Van de Vijver, 2013). ERS and SDR are positive indicators, and ARS and MRS are negative indicators of this style.

The interpretation of response styles has turned out to be complex. The original idea behind response styles was that such styles reflect the tendency of individuals to present themselves in a favourable way and that this managed impression was obstructing the view on the real person. As a consequence, response styles were to be eliminated or at least minimized to the extent possible. A good example is the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1963). The questionnaire has a Lie Scale. Scores on the other personality scales, measuring psychoticism, extroversion, and neuroticism, are only interpreted if the score on the Lie Scale is below a critical threshold. This view of deliberate response distortion that should be eliminated has been dominant and continues to be dominant in psychology.

Interestingly, an alternative view on response styles has been developed in cross-cultural psychology (Smith, 2011), going back to work by, among others, McCrae and Costa (1983), who argued that response styles refer to impression formation, which is part and parcel of personality, notably agreeableness. Corrections for response styles then amount to the undesirable elimination of sources of salient individual differences. In line with the latter view, the GRS has been interpreted as a communication filter (i.e., response amplification to moderation) (He & Van de Vijver, 2013). There is cross-cultural evidence that cultures differ systematically in response styles (He & Van de Vijver, 2015), in that countries that are less affluent score on average higher on response styles. Individuals in such countries tend to emphasize the importance of group membership and allegiance to others, which is particularly important in collectivistic cultures. There is some evidence that if response styles are corrected for, the influence on rank orders of individuals and countries is minimal. For example, He and Van de Vijver (2015) found that correction for individual and country differences in social desirability, did not have an appreciable impact on individual or country differences in several teacher-related variables. The correlations of scores before and after correction for social desirability were well in the .90s both for individuals and countries.

### **2.3. Acculturation**

The field of acculturation is in flux. In the early years of psychological research, the field was dominated by what is now known as the one-dimensional model (Gordon,

1964). This view on acculturation was largely based on migration from Europe to the US. The most common type of acculturation outcome was that after a few generations the European immigrants had become American citizens and had adopted the language and values of the receiving society. The initial cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the immigrants had vanished.

A new paradigm in acculturation research was predicated on the work by Berry (1997), who argued that complete accommodation of the host culture and simultaneous loss of the culture of descent are not always the outcomes of acculturation processes. For example there are many ethnic groups that maintain their original language for extended periods of time; good examples are Chinese migrants who sometimes still speak Mandarin or Cantonese after having lived a few hundred years in another country. So, the adoption of culture does not necessarily lead to loss of the original culture.

Berry proposed a model in which immigrants have to deal with two questions: Do I want to maintain my ethnic culture and do I want to establish contacts with the new culture? The latter question has also been formulated as: Do I want to adopt the new culture (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2006; Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011)? Assuming that both questions are answered with yes or no, four acculturation orientations can be defined: assimilation (abandoning the ethnic culture and immersing in the host culture), integration (adopting the new culture and maintaining the ethnic culture), separation (abandoning the host culture and maintaining the ethnic culture), and marginalization (abandoning both cultures).

Despite the popularity of the model, some problems have emerged in its applications. The first is terminological. Integration refers in Berry's framework to biculturalism; an integrated immigrant has a dual cultural identity. However, in other sciences addressing acculturation, such as sociology, integration refers to adjustment; an integrated immigrant is then an immigrant who is well adapted to the new cultural context, often with the connotation that the ethnic culture has been lost. In other words, integration in sociology corresponds to assimilation in Berry's model. Clearly, this terminology is confusing. In the last decade the term bicultural has become more common; this term avoids the confusion of the term integration. The second problem is that Berry's model implicitly assumes that immigrants can choose all four acculturation options and that integration (biculturalism) is the best possible option to ensure positive acculturation outcomes. However, in practice this does not need to be the case. Many countries support policies that make particular acculturation orientations more likely, such as the strong pressure in France toward language assimilation. Integration is not a viable option in all contexts (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). The third problem is that Berry's model implicitly assumes that acculturation orientations are the same in all life domains. However, there is evidence that migrants can vary their acculturation orientation across life domains. For example, Turkish-Dutch prefer biculturalism in the public domain and separation in the private domain. The fourth problem is the most serious. There is an increasing group of immigrants who do not navigate two cultures but multiple cultures (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015; Vertovec, 2007). An example can be found in work acculturation of Jamaicans in the US (Ferguson, Bornstein, & Pottinger, 2012). These migrants identify with three cultures: the Jamaican culture, the U.S. culture, and the African-American culture.

The new paradigm in acculturation research that emerges follows again the new, changing reality of migration (Van de Vijver, 2015). Migration has diversified in the last decades. The implicit idea of the previous paradigm in which a monocultural immigrant

settles permanently in another monocultural context is still adequate for many migrants, but there are more and more migrants who live in very different contexts. Examples are expatriates, who often live in multiple countries in their professional career, exchange students who have short sojourns in the host country, employees who work in an international context and who have to adjust to the demands of such a context, migrants who come to live in multicultural neighbourhoods, etc. The new paradigm in acculturation research needs to be more flexible than the previous one and should be able to accommodate all these acculturating groups. Furthermore, it is likely that the new paradigm is less focused on the issue of maintenance and adoption, and more on how migrants negotiate their identities in the new context. The change from acculturation orientation to identity implies *a transition from an ethnic to a cultural perspective* in acculturation research. Acculturation research will probably develop a closer link to current models of identity, such as models of social and collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Ethnic identity is just one of the many identities that are important in the diaspora; other examples are family identity, regional identity, religious identity, and professional identity. Obviously this list can only be tentative. A good knowledge of the local context and immigrant group is needed to appreciate which identities will be important for a specific migrant.

### 3. Conclusion

Cross-cultural psychology is relevant for Romania in at least three domains of research and application. The first is participation of Romania in large-scale surveys. This paper started by observing that Romania is a relatively white spot on the cross-cultural psychology map of the world. We need more solid insight in how norms, values, and attitudes in Romania are similar to and different from other countries in the world. The same is true for personality, educational achievement, and many other topics of large-scale international surveys. The second domain is the study of Romanians in the diaspora. Romanians have migrated to a massive number of countries. There is little systematic knowledge of the acculturation of Romanians across these different countries, nor do we know much in which countries these migrants are more (or less) successful. The third domain is the study of cultural diversity within Romania. The population of Romania is ethnically highly diverse ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minorities\\_of\\_Romania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minorities_of_Romania)). It is interesting to study this diversity more systematically so that we understand more about the intergroup relations in the country.

It is impossible to address all issues relevant for Romanian cross-cultural studies within the space constraints of a journal article. Yet, this article will hopefully be sufficient to clarify that there is a dearth of such studies, that such studies are tremendously important both nationally and internationally, and that the richness of the country and its culture is an excellent starting point for conducting cross-cultural research.

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