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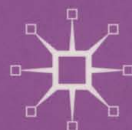

# 5
# accommodation and institutional talk: communicative dimensions of police–civilian interactions[1]

howard giles, christopher hajek, valerie barker, mei-chen lin, yan bing zhang, mary lee hummert and michelle chernikoff anderson

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) has been described as one of the most prominent theories in communication in general (see Littlejohn & Foss, 2005; Tomsha & Hernandez, 2007) as well as in the social psychology of language in particular (Tracy & Haspel, 2004), and has currency in several disciplines (see Meyerhoff, 1998). Indeed, from its initial roots in accent, speech style, and bilingual modifications (see Sachdev & Giles, 2004), CAT has expanded into being an 'interdisciplinary model of relational and identity processes in communicative interaction' (Coupland & Jaworski, 1997, pp.241–242). Research has applied the theory (e.g., Coupland & Giles, 1988; Williams, Gallois & Pittam, 1999) in a wide variety of nations, cultures and languages; to study communication between different social groups (cultures, genders, generations and abilities); in different social and institutional contexts (in organizations, in the health care system, the courtroom, or simply the streets); and through different media (face-to-face interactions, but also radio, telephone, email, etc.). Although the majority of work has been conducted from neo-positivistic and experimental frameworks to enhance control of the variables being investigated, the methodologies and disciplines invoked have, nonetheless, been impressively broad (see Giles, 1984; Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991).

In this chapter, we focus on CAT's utility for analysing one under-studied domain of intergroup communication, namely police–civilian encounters

(Giles, 2002). By so doing, we focus on one aspect of institutional talk where a power imbalance is clearly evident. In addition to presenting recent self-report data relevant to this initiative, new intercultural data are also introduced. As an illustrative resource to call upon interpretively throughout this chapter, imagine now a traffic stop where an older male Caucasian police officer engages three young female African American students for allegedly running a stop sign. Think of the variety of social dimensions involved in this situation: gender, culture and ethnicity, social and occupational status, age, and so forth. How are the different personal and social identities negotiated during the interaction? Who changes his or her communicative style to accommodate whom? What are the outcomes of such accommodating behaviours on the relationship between the interactants? In what follows, we make reference to this scenario to show how CAT can be informative to civilian-law enforcement encounters (Giles, Willemyns, Gallois & Anderson, in press). Later in the chapter, we introduce new cross-cultural data on perceptions of accommodation in such encounters. First, however, we overview some important assumptions and concepts of the theory, interlaced with a selection of empirical research studies.

## the pillars of CAT

Since its inception in the early 1970s, CAT has undergone several conceptual refinements and theoretical elaborations, as exemplified by moves from speech into the nonlinguistic and discursive arenas (see Gallois, Ogay & Giles, 2005, for a history of its development). Because the extensive amount of CAT research and theorizing can be somewhat overwhelming, predictive models have been developed in an effort to better organize and summarize thinking on these matters (e.g., Street & Giles, 1982; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles & Coupland, 1988). However, because of the perpetual refinements of this prepositional format, some expositions of CAT may have become overly dense for some tastes. Hence, in parallel, other reviews have engaged the theory in a more textually flowing fashion, unfettered by propositional frames (e.g., Giles & Noels, 1998; Giles & Wadleigh, 1999; see however, Giles, Willemyns et al., in press). It is in this same reader-friendly spirit (after Giles & Ogay, in press) that we provide a snapshot of the literature here.

CAT provides a wide-ranging framework aimed at predicting and explaining many of the adjustments individuals make to create, maintain or decrease social distance in interaction. It explores the different ways in which we accommodate our communication, our motivations for

doing so, and the consequences. For instance, conveyed accommodation often has its desired effect in terms of increasing the likelihood that recipients will feel more positively toward the instigator (Bourhis, Giles & Lambert, 1975). CAT addresses interpersonal communication issues, yet also links communication with the larger context of the *intergroup* stakes of an encounter (see Harwood & Giles, 2005). In other words, sometimes our communications are driven by our personal identities while at others – and sometimes within the very same interaction – our words, nonverbal behaviour, and demeanour are fuelled almost entirely, by our social identities as members of particular groups.

In another example, a speaker (call her Jill) may in a particular context not speak so much *as the individual Jill*, but as someone who represents (as nearly as possible) the prototype of her group, in this case social psychologists, to an audience of (say) lawyers, architects and business people. It is relevant to this chapter that, of all such social encounters, the police officer–civilian one is amongst *the* most visible and salient intergroup-wise across many nations (Molloy & Giles, 2002). An officer's uniform and badge, together with a readily visible array of weaponry, as well as the unique legal authority to use coercive force (Klockars, 1985), can make this a threatening relationship for civilians. Add into the mix the frequent militaristic hairstyle of male officers, in the USA anyway, and another layer of perceived authoritarianism can often be apparent (Giles, Zwang-Weissman & Hajek, 2004). Interestingly as we shall see from data presented in this chapter, the 'intergroupness' of the police–community divide can vary cross-culturally.

Before engaging its theoretical tenets and empirical support, two rather fundamental assumptions of CAT are worth laying out. First, communication is influenced not only by features of the immediate situation and participants' initial orientations to it, but also by the socio-historical context in which the interaction is embedded (see Fox, Giles, Orbe & Bourhis, 2000). For example, an isolated encounter between a particular police officer and citizen could be marred by alleged past hostile relations between *other* members of these two groups in the neighbourhood and/or on the media – as would probably be apparent for many citizens of colour in New York, Los Angeles or Cincinnati (see Lawrence, 2000; Ross, 2000). Current accommodations, or the lack of them, can be borne out of significant *others'* histories of conflict on the one hand, or good will on the other.

Second, communication is not only a matter of exchanging information about facts, ideas and emotions (often called referential communication), as often salient social category memberships are also negotiated during an

interaction through the process of accommodation. An example of this could be the decision by a bilingual Latina police officer to use Spanish or English with other Spanish-speaking citizens on her beat. Here she would be negotiating two identities: as an officer of the law and as a Latina. Her choice of language may depend on whether she wishes to emphasize a shared identity (speaking Spanish to show that she and the citizen share a common language and culture) or a discordant identity (speaking English to make salient her position as an authority).

## strategies of accommodation and nonaccommodation

CAT posits that individuals use communication in part in order to indicate their attitudes toward each other and, as such, communication is a barometer of the level of social distance between them. This constant movement toward and away from others by changing one's communicative behaviour is called *accommodation*. Among the different accommodative strategies that speakers use to achieve these goals, *convergence* has been the most extensively studied, and can be considered the historical core of CAT (Giles, 1973). Convergence has been defined as a strategy whereby individuals adapt their communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., speech rates, accents), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance lengths) and nonverbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutor's behaviours (for examples, see Azuma, 1997; Hannah & Murachver, 1999; Levin & Lin, 1988; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002). Even in the rather socially 'bare' context of communication via email, Thomson, Murachver and Green (2001) have found that women and men converge to the language styles (more female- or male-like) of their net-pals (see also Crook & Booth, 1997; regarding answering machine messages, see Buzzanell, Burrell, Stafford & Berkowitz, 1996).

Accommodation can also vary from slight to full (or even beyond) to the extent to which speakers approximate the communicative patterns of their receivers (Bradac, Mulac & House, 1988; Street, 1982). Moreover, receivers have *expectations* about optimal levels of accommodation. Violation of these expectations can result in a negative evaluation of speakers by their receivers. For instance, Preston (1981) found that full convergence, in the case of foreign language learning, is not always desired by either the speaker or the addressee. He argues that full convergence, or native speaker-like fluency, is often viewed with distrust and seen as controlling by the addressee. These expectations can be based on social *stereotypes* regarding outgroup members (and, in particular, regarding their levels of communicative competence).

It is important to underscore that people are theorized by CAT to accommodate to where they *believe* others are communicatively and not necessarily to how the latter actually speak in any objective or measured senses (see Thakerar, Giles & Cheshire, 1982; Ross & Shortreed, 1990). This is illustrated by Bell's (1984) study of New Zealand broadcasters, who read the same news transcripts on a number of quite different stations, varying their speech according to assumed audience characteristics. It was found that this same content was read in very different ways that accommodated the accent and style of people with the *assumed* socioeconomic status of their listeners.

## accommodative motives and communication satisfaction

An important *motive* for convergence is the desire to gain approval from another, particularly in the case where there is a status, power or respect differential (see Fitzpatrick, Mulac & Dindia, 1995). For most organizations, accommodation is also central to their relations with customers and the public in general. Sparks and Callan (1992) applied CAT to the hospitality industry and showed how much a convergent style of communication with consumers is important for customers' satisfaction. This has been observed in a number of settings where, for example, a travel agent accommodated in her pronunciation to the different socioeconomically-based language styles of her Welsh clientele (Coupland, 1984) and in Taiwan, where salespersons converged more to customers than vice-versa (van den Berg, 1986). Not unrelatedly, popular American TV talk show host Larry King was found to change the pitch of his voice as a function of his guests' status; for example, he would converge toward President Clinton (see Al-Khatib, 1995). Conversely, those of King's guests who were held in lower social regard (e.g., Vice-President Dan Quayle) would accommodate more to Larry King than he would to them (Gregory & Webster, 1996).

Bourhis (1984) studied accommodative strategies in Montreal by asking Francophone and Anglophone pedestrians about directions, either in English or in French. He found that 30 per cent of Anglophones maintained English in their responses when they had been addressed in French, even when their linguistic skills would have been sufficient to answer in French. In contrast, only 3 per cent of Francophone pedestrians used French in their answers to the English-speaking interlocutor. The difference in accommodative behaviour displayed by the two groups of pedestrians is explained by the Canadian intergroup context. Traditionally, the Anglophone minority has higher status and power

within the Francophone majority setting of Montreal (see also Lawson & Sachdev, 2000).

In another institutional CAT study, this time in Australia, Gardner and Jones (1999) invited superordinates (i.e., supervisors) and subordinates to write down what they would say at 'best' and at 'worst' to their counterparts in a variety of communicative situations offered them (e.g., 'you have an informal chat with your subordinate' or 'you are negotiating a change in your working situation with your superior'). Analysis of the data showed that, for both organizational groups, the best communications were coded, as would be predicted, accommodative. For superordinates, this was indicated by taking the listener's position and knowledge into account and being clear and direct, while for subordinates it was manifest more in listening, asking for input, and being open. The worst communications were clearly *non*accommodative. For superordinates, such talk was overaccommodative, manifest in being overly familiar while, for subordinates, it was more underaccommodative and expressed through being too demanding and aggressive (see also Watson & Gallois, 1999). Hence, participants holding different institutional roles do report varying conversations between themselves in accommodation terms (see also Baker, 1991; Boggs & Giles, 1999).

In a similar vein, research has shown that young people report that conversations considered satisfying with older strangers were imbued with accommodating stances from the latter, while dissatisfying intergenerational encounters tended to be replete with nonaccommodations (Williams & Giles, 1996). In parallel, grandchildren and grandparents in the USA and Taiwan report (although in different ways) that the closeness of their family relationship is contingent on how accommodating their communications were (e.g., they complimented, did not talk down to, each other; see Harwood, 2000; Lin & Harwood, 2003). For grandchildren, this, in turn, has been associated with positive attitudes towards older adults in general (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini & Voci, 2005). Interestingly, extensive cross-cultural research has shown that elderly people who feel generally accommodated to report better subjective health in terms of lowered depression and heightened self-esteem and life satisfaction (see overview, Giles, McCann, Ota & Noels, 2002).

## effectiveness, social identity and nonaccommodation

Accommodating to a common linguistic style and taking into account the listener's interpretive competence or knowledge about a topic (Coupland, Coupland, Giles & Henwood, 1988) also improves the effectiveness of communication. This, in turn, has been associated with increased predict-

ability of the other and hence a lowering of uncertainty, interpersonal anxiety, and an increase in mutual understanding (see Gudykunst, 1995). Bourhis, Roth and MacQueen (1988) found that physicians, nurses and hospital patients considered it more appropriate for health professionals to converge to the patients' everyday language than to maintain their medical jargon. In fact, talking excessively about oneself and one's ailments (Coupland, Coupland & Giles, 1991) and not attending or listening to the other (Giles & Williams, 1994) can be considered *under*accommodative (see Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). Indeed, in the scenario earlier, imagine the police officer does not explain the reason for the traffic stop and emergent citation, nor inquire about the driver's understanding of her transgression and her reasoning for it, and even adopts legalese. Such a nonaccommodating, non-confirming (Sieburg, 1976) stance could instil additional aggravation and irritation in the driver and her passengers, possibly leading to a complaint or even worse.

But accommodation is not only rewarding when it occurs, it may well entail some costs, such as the possible loss of personal or social identity. Again returning to the opening scenario – if the student driver converges towards the officer's communicative style, she may be rewarded by the officer who will perceive her as particularly cooperative and understanding (see Buller, LePoire, Aune & Eloy, 1992), yet the student may also feel deprived of her social identity. Members of her ingroup (e.g., the passengers in the car) who hear her might also perceive her as a 'traitor' and construe and label her derogatorily (Hogg, D'Agata & Abrams, 1989). That said, on reflection passengers may appreciate the prudence of her communicative inclinations for all concerned and especially so if she accounts for her actions to her ingroup as they leave the scene.

Accommodative moves to such outgroups are also variously appreciated by ingroup members, depending on the strength of their attachment to the group. In a study conducted in Hong Kong one year before its handover to the People's Republic of China, respondents with a strong identification to Hong Kong evaluated more favourably their ingroup members who, by using Cantonese, diverged from Mandarin-speaking Chinese people than did respondents who identified themselves with mainland China (Tong, Hong, Lee & Chiu, 1999). Divergence and nonaccommodation can be endorsed as a positive means of maintaining or even accentuating one's social identity (Giles, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). All in all, it appears that satisfying communication requires a delicate balance between convergence, to demonstrate willingness to communicate, and divergence, to incur a healthy sense of group identity (see Cargile & Giles, 1996). Furthermore, calibrating the amount of perceived non-, under-

and overaccommodation one receives can be an important ingredient in continuing or withdrawing from an interaction.

In what follows, we present some recent and new data which examine accommodative phenomena, albeit self-reported in a context where it is very difficult to access and record ongoing naturalistic data, in civilians' evaluations of their experiences with police officers. Before engaging that, it is important to examine, and be armed with knowledge about, cross-disciplinary studies on attitudes toward law enforcement.

## attitudes toward law enforcement

The National Research Council (2004) states that a major dilemma facing police officers is that 'public demands for effective law enforcement may seem to conflict with the responsibility to protect individual civil liberties' (p.57). Correspondingly, many civilians can hold 'contradictory perceptions of the police' (White & Menke, 1982, p.223), with police being construed as almost revered – and yet despised – at one and the same time (Molloy & Giles, 2002). This ambivalence is only one of the many contributors making street police work an emotionally stressful occupation (Howard, Tuffin & Stephens, 2000; see also Toch, 2003) and one where the vast majority of officers themselves concede that they have an image problem (Oberle, 2004). Negative representations of police on fictional drama, reality shows and news programmes are not foreign to TV viewers (e.g., Eschholz, Sims Blackwell, Gertz & Chiricos, 2002; van den Bulck, 1998), with attention often being focused, perhaps overly so, on occasions where police abuses of force have allegedly occurred (e.g., Lawrence, 2000; Ross, 2000). However, incidents such as the Rodney King beating and that of two Mexican immigrants, as well as the videotaped slamming of the head of a Black teenager on a police cruiser in Los Angeles in the 1990s, have hampered police efforts to improve their image. Yet more recent events demonstrating police bravery and dedication in New York City and New Orleans have undoubtedly gone some way to compensate for this (Paulson, 2001).

The public's attitudes are, of course, also shaped by *actual*, rather than parasocial, interactions with officers, many of which occur via traffic stops (Griffiths & Winfree, 1982; Langan, Greenfeld, Smith, Durose & Levin, 2001; see also, Wortley, 1996). Indeed, Hennigan, Maxson, Sloane and Ranney (2002) found in four areas of Los Angeles that, while 35 per cent of respondents believed the mass media were the greatest influence on their opinions of local law enforcement, 65 per cent believed that personal experience was the factor that shaped their views most (see also,

Tyler & Huo, 2002). As the National Research Council (2004) points out, '...the sheer volume of police–citizen contact means that a significant number of individual citizens come away dissatisfied with how they were treated' (p.2), even though, in all likelihood, the vast majority of interactions with the public are non-problematic.

Although no empirically-robust meta-analysis of documented attitudes towards the police exists, many investigations have pointed to the role of socio-demographic factors in predicting such judgements, albeit varying greatly from community to community (e.g., Klyman & Kruckenberg, 1974). Older, female, urban, better educated, higher incomed, married and Caucasian respondents in comparison to their social counterparts consistently manifest more positive views of law enforcement (e.g., Eschholz et al., 2002; Olsen, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Yates & Pillai, 1996) as do many of those who reside in communities where the level of criminal disorder is purportedly low (Hennigan et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, Cox and White (1988) report that those with negative views of the police have often had disturbing police contacts, felt they were victims of unfair police decisions, and perceived the police as verbally harassing them. Sixty-nine per cent of the participants in their study reported a negative police contact, 35 per cent felt verbally abused, and 15 per cent of their sample 'perceived that the officer had directed profanity at them' (p.120).

The perceptions of various groups about law enforcement, as alluded to above, have received widespread empirical attention. Taylor, Turner, Esbensen and Winfree (2001) found that Caucasians and Asians had the more favourable views of police, followed by Hispanics and Native Americans, and then African Americans. These results, particularly as they relate African Americans' trust in law enforcement (Huo & Tyler, 2000; Tyler, 2001; Tyler & Huo, 2002), have been confirmed by many others (e.g., Parker, Onyekwuluje & Murty, 1995; Prine, Ballard & Robinson, 2001; Smith & Hawkins, 1973; Wortley, 1996). Gratifyingly, contact in some locations between African American juveniles and community-oriented police officers by means of weekly club meetings and collaborative projects has been documented as improving images of the police in general, such as police being seen as less authoritarian (e.g., Derbyshire, 1968; Jones-Brown, 2000; see however, Hopkins & Hewstone, 1992).

## accommodative dimensions of attitudes toward police

Previous research has focused as well on other structural factors that affect attitudes towards police (ATP). For example, in an attempt to explore

empirically the perceived role of officers' accommodation, Giles, Fortman et al. (2006) studied three fairly large samples of respondents who were asked in a variety of ways and contexts (e.g., after church in Spanish, a community door-to-door survey in English, and at a campus online) about their attitudes towards specified local law enforcement agencies in southern California. The police agencies involved were associated with a small city north of Los Angeles and the local university campus near that location. A range of socio-demographic factors and other questions were posed, such as perceptions of trust in officers, amount of contact with them, and felt anxiety. In addition, depending on the sample, items relating to how accommodating officers appeared to them were included: how well they believed that officers listened to people, took their views into account, and wanted to understand their needs and unique situations.

In general, ratings of and satisfaction with local police agencies were significantly above the neutral mid-point, with males, non-Caucasians, and younger people being less positive in these regards. Furthermore, and invoking separate structural equation models for the three quite different populations, socio-demographic factors (apart from age in one locale) had no direct effects on assessments of local officers and rated satisfaction with them. In other words, socio-demographic variables paled in comparison to perceptions of officers' communication skills. Similarly, even gender, reported income, amount of estimated contact with police, and how safe respondents felt had relatively less bearing on respondents' attitudes when these were built into the evaluative frame. How much respondents perceived officers as accommodating was by far the largest predictor of attitudes toward the police. It was more powerful than rated trust in the police and willingness to call them, both of which also had direct paths to outcomes. Furthermore, not only were trust and accommodation mutually influential, but accommodation also had the same relationship with willingness to call as well as obey the police. Interestingly, when the survey was administered to Spanish-speaking Latinos (mostly Mexican immigrants), it was found that the less people reported police as having been accommodating in their country of origin, the less accommodating they found them in the host community.

Additionally, the amount of contact with officers and how safe respondents felt had little bearing on ATP. Furthermore, communication issues were construed as paramount when generated spontaneously by respondents in their open-ended responses. Whether this potent role for officers' perceived accommodativeness in predicting ATP is not context-specific – and an even more global one – is an empirical question. In order

to begin exploring this challenging issue, we examined attitudes toward police in quite contrasting settings.

## new vistas for the study of accommodation and ATP

The goal of the current study was to collect reasonably large data sets in three very different locales: one in the USA but this time in Kansas, and the other two in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan. In addition to their significant ethnolinguistic differences, these locales were chosen for their histories of police–community conflicts. Therefore, we wondered (besides other questions beyond the remit of the current chapter)[2] if perceived accommodation would have a focal role in ATP predictions in these different locations, and to what extent.

There appears, unfortunately, to be no scholarly research on attitudes towards law enforcement in the Kansan setting. That said, a plethora of articles in the local *Lawrence Journal World* during 2002–03 were highly critical of police practices in the city of Lawrence. Charges levied by the community (as well as a judge) were wide-ranging and hardly contribute to a positive image of law enforcement in the State. Amongst the claims were police harassment, being untrustworthy and irresponsive to complaints, claiming police brutality, conducting unconstitutional searches (during traffic stops), and interrogating without offering those accused their legal rights. Notwithstanding the notion of 'good press' about police actions not surfacing at this time which could provide some sort of media balance, it would seem likely that the communicative climate in this city is probably antithetical – or at least ambivalent – toward local law enforcement.

Turning to Taiwan, it appears that the picture is much bleaker. Police officers (compared with people from other occupations) are not highly regarded in this society. As part of Confucian society, Taiwanese people endorse education (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka & Beom, 2005) and associate higher education with steady and promising careers. The education system separates schools for training police officers from the normal college track and vocational school systems. Most parents discourage their children from entering police schools if there is a possibility of entering any college or university. As a result, and despite recent upgrading of teaching resources for officers, stereotypically they are perceived as intellectually inferior to other college students (Judicial Reformed Foundation, 2002) and their reputation seems to be diminishing almost every year. Moreover, fairly large surveys by Yu (1992) and Lin (2001) found that the public wished that the police would not only protect their property and safety, but would also adopt a more 'customer-oriented approach',

responding to the needs of the public in a timely manner and being much more concerned about building positive images of themselves as approachable, trustworthy and friendly.

In Taiwan, the boundaries between police officers, local gangs and politicians can be fairly blurred. Police officers are perceived as abusing their authority, being open to bribes, and being rude to the public. The Judicial Reform Foundation (1999) conducted an online survey about people's understanding of their rights when questioned by the police. Among 623 respondents, only 12 per cent of them believed that they would be treated fairly and reasonably when they were questioned by the police. Not only did participants not trust the police, they would also seek outside sources to intervene to protect their safety. Using a nationwide telephone interview (n = 4062), and when asked about what should be done to improve safety, the quality of the police recruits was ranked number one, even over preventing drug sales (Ministry of the Interior, 2003). Added to this, feelings of distrust for the police and safety are common ingredients of 24-hour TV news channels.

Finally, we turn to the PRC, where data in English on this topic are infrequently found and where images of the police among the public are often formed from crime fiction (Kinkley, 1993). In the mid-1990s, the police and local judges were under pressure to make the country safer and reduce major crime. Indeed, the force grew by 45 per cent (Gilley, 1996) as did the quality of training, a surge of arrests, and trials lasting a week. Even torture and executions followed. At the start of the new century, a Criminal Justice System Roundtable was formed before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (Legislative Branch Commissioners, 2002), part of which focused on the elevated fear Chinese people had of the police. This factor is compounded by one authority at the Roundtable reporting that, 'I do not exaggerate, many street level Chinese police probably have less knowledge of modern crime scene management, fingerprinting, blood typing and rudimentary forensic and investigatory skills than the average American viewer of *Law and Order*' (p.7). That said, Cao and Hou (2001) published a comparative study claiming that public confidence in the police was greater in the PRC than the USA.

In sum, and much in contrast to the southern Californian setting discussed above, all three contexts here indicate past consternations with police work and the images that naturally follow about its personnel. And unlike the former setting, efforts are underway in both Kansas and the PRC to raise awareness about alleged police transgressions. Clearly,

the Taiwanese situation until very recently has endured a longstanding climate of duress between officers and the communities they serve.

With this backdrop in mind, and in light of research on the roles of perceived trust and communicative accommodation in determining attitudes towards police, we posed just one hypothesis for our purposes in this chapter:

> Perceived trust in and accommodation from officers will be mutually influential of each other, with accommodation being the major predictor of students' ratings of and satisfaction with police in all three cultural contexts.

## a cross-cultural investigation

Undergraduate students (n = 682) from universities in Taiwan, the PRC and the USA completed the survey. The study participants in PRC and Taiwan were recruited through flyers and the students in the United States received extra course credit for their participation. The Taiwan sample (n = 216; 112 females) was drawn from undergraduate psychology, communication studies, sociology and law students at a university in Taipei. All participants were of Chinese (Han) ethnic origin, and ranged in age from 18 to 40, with a mean reported age of 21.54 (SD = 3.02). The PRC sample (n = 227; 118 females) was drawn from undergraduate students at a university in Beijing. As with the Taiwan sample, all were of Chinese (Han) ethnic origin, and ranged in age from 17 to 26, with a mean reported age of 19.41 (SD = 1.35). Finally, the United States sample (n = 239; 119 females) was drawn from undergraduate communication students at a Midwestern university. In this sample, the majority of participants were Caucasian (89 per cent), the remainder being of Asian/Pacific Island (3.8 per cent), African American (2.9 per cent), Latino/a (2.5 per cent), and 'Other American' (1.7 per cent) descent. Their ages ranged from 18 to 32, with a mean reported age of 20.46 (SD = 2.02). At each site, participants completed the questionnaires in small groups under the supervision of a research assistant, resulting in a 100 per cent response rate.

The survey utilized a between-subjects design to examine participants' attitudes toward law enforcement across the three countries. The 38-item instrument was largely comprised of seven-point Likert-type items assessing attitudes toward police in general, as well as a number of demographic items. Assessment items were anchored by 'strongly

agree' and 'strongly disagree', or by bi-polar semantic differential items (e.g., 'very unpleasant' to 'very pleasant'). The English version of the questionnaire was translated into Chinese by two of the bilingual authors of this study. Results were compared, and experts in the PRC and Taiwan were consulted in this process. A back translation procedure was adopted to ensure that the translation was sensitive to the cultural contexts, and that the instrument's original meaning was not distorted.

Questionnaire items were adapted from previous surveys of attitudes toward local law enforcement, and included items about perceived contacts with, obligations to obey, trust in, and accommodation from, officers, as well as general feelings of safety (see Table 5.1). Single-item measures – to be comparative with prior studies – were also used to assess satisfaction with the police (i.e., *how satisfied are you with services provided*

*Table 5.1* Questionnaire items

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|---|
| *Police officer accommodation:* |
| How pleasant overall are the police? |
| In general, how accommodating are police officers? (i.e., how well do you think they listen to people, take their views into account, and want to understand their needs and unique situations?) |
| In general, how respectful of students are police officers? |
| How polite are police officers? |
| How well do police officers explain things to people (i.e., talk to people in ways that 'sit right' with them, and that they understand)?* |
| *Trust:* |
| How much respect do you have for the police?* |
| To what degree do you think police officers are honest? |
| To what degree do you feel proud of the police? |
| To what degree do you feel you should support the police?* |
| To what degree do you feel that police decisions are fair? |
| To what degree do you feel the police protect citizen rights?* |
| I have confidence that the police department can do its job well* |
| I trust the police to make decisions that are good for everyone in the community |
| *Tendency to obey:* |
| People should obey the police even if what the police officers say or do goes against what they think is right |
| I would always try to follow what a police officer says I should do, even if I thought it was wrong* |
| Disobeying a police officer is seldom justified |
| Overall, the police are a legitimate legal authority, and people should obey the decisions that police officers make* |
| *Safety:* |
| I feel safe at home |
| I feel safe walking alone in the daytime |
| I feel safe walking alone at night when it is dark* |

* *Item dropped in structural equation models*

*by the police?*), and evaluations of them (i.e., *overall, how would you rate the police department?*). In addition, participants were asked to report how much police-initiated contact they had experienced, how much they themselves had initiated, and how much contact they had witnessed others experience. Furthermore, two (intergroup) items were used to assess the degree to which participants perceived of themselves and the police as belonging to different social categories (i.e., *if you were to meet a police officer [or when you have interacted with one], how aware would you be that the two of you belonged to different communities?* And, *if you were to meet a police officer [or when you have interacted with one], how aware would you be that you were two people representing the respective groups to which you belong?*). Finally, participants were asked to report their comfort in voicing their concerns to their police department (i.e., *if I have a problem with the police department, I feel I can voice my concern to it*).

## findings

Table 5.2 presents the mean differences between the three cultures across all the measures. Multivariate statistics applied to these data showed clear differences between the Kansan, Taiwan and PRC settings,[3] with Taiwan offering, arguably, the least conducive climate for satisfactory police–community relations and Kansas being perceived by far as the safest.[4] Intriguingly, few differences arose between the PRC and USA settings, and when they did it favoured the former on some ways given

*Table 5.2* Means and standard deviations for all factors and individual measures by culture

| | China | Taiwan | USA |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Factors* | | | |
| Accommodation | 3.94 (1.06) | 3.47 (1.04) | 3.81 (1.22) |
| Trust | 4.18 (1.13) | 3.14 (1.16) | 4.36 (1.14) |
| Tendency to obey | 3.49 (1.42) | 3.25 (1.24) | 4.21 (1.31) |
| Safety | 3.92 (1.48) | 3.95 (1.29) | 6.28 (0.83) |
| *Individual Measures* | | | |
| Satisfaction | 4.12 (1.40) | 3.43 (1.30) | 4.58 (1.44) |
| Rating | 4.23 (1.34) | 3.48 (1.33) | 4.63 (1.36) |
| Belong to two communities | 4.98 (1.61) | 5.17 (1.44) | 4.37 (1.62) |
| Represent respective groups | 5.09 (1.60) | 5.30 (1.43) | 4.56 (1.28) |
| Police-initiated contact | 1.41 (0.94) | 2.31 (1.46) | 3.09 (1.64) |
| Citizen-initiated contact | 2.52 (1.52) | 2.21 (1.33) | 2.46 (1.34) |
| Others' contact (witnessed) | 3.30 (1.77) | 3.45 (1.70) | 4.43 (1.61) |
| Comfort voicing concerns to police | 4.91 (1.90) | 4.42 (1.75) | 4.08 (1.78) |

lower police-initiated contacts and more expressed comfort in offering police complaints.

Moving to the main objective of our investigation which was to explore the roles of perceived trust in and accommodation from officers in moulding the public attitudes toward law enforcement, structural equation models were constructed for each country. These models tested for the influence of gender, trust in police officers and perceived officer accommodation on police department ratings and satisfaction with services by police. Additionally, the relationships between these factors and perceived obligation to obey and feelings of safety were assessed (with earlier model construction rendering the various forms of contact with police non-influential).[5]

For each location, a full model was initially tested and non-significant paths were subsequently removed. The PRC and USA models were very similar – a nested models comparison indicated no statistically significant difference ($p = .13$) – and they showed that trust in the police influenced participants' ratings of and satisfaction with the police. Additionally, the results showed strong covariance between perceptions of police accommodation and the two factors, trust in police and the perceived obligation to obey. Also, trust in the police co-varied with perceived obligation to obey. The final model statistics show good fit for both locations[6] and there were no significant relationships for gender or safety in these models. Figure 5.1 is a composite model for the PRC and USA.

The model for the Taiwanese participants shared the paths described by the other two models, but was strikingly different in other ways.[7] The model showed a positive relationship between gender and perceptions of police officers' accommodation and also level of trust in police. This suggests that Taiwanese females perceive police officers as more accommodating and trustworthy than do Taiwanese males. The model also shows covariance between perceived obligation to obey and feelings of safety. Perhaps most telling was the relatively strong influence of police accommodation on ratings of the police department and satisfaction with police services. Thus, while trust in the police is still influential in this model (particularly on ratings of the police department), accommodation is equally as influential among the Taiwanese participants (see Figure 5.2).

It may be recalled that we predicted that perceived trust in and accommodation from officers would be mutually influential of each other, with accommodation being *the major* predictor of ratings of and satisfaction with police in all three cultural contexts. This hypothesis was supported in that accommodation and trust were mutually influential. However, their roles in predicting satisfaction and ratings of police varied

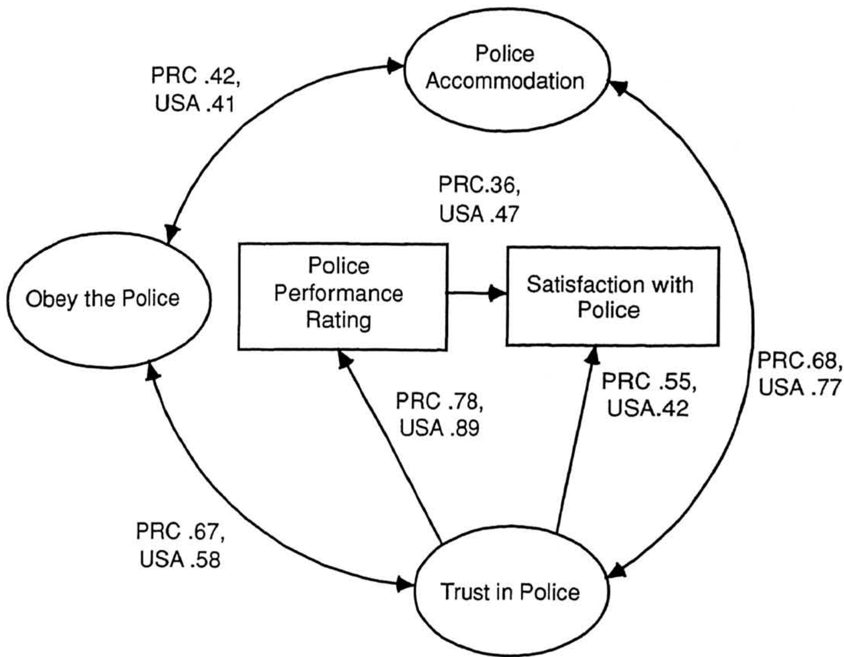


*Figure 5.1* Attitudes to police: People's Republic of China and USA

by culture. Interestingly, trust was the *only* predictor of satisfaction and ratings in the USA and the PRC, whereas *both* trust and accommodation were predictors in Taiwan. Indeed, Figure 5.2 (for Taiwan) shares many similarities with models that emerged from investigations in California reported above (Giles, Fortman et al., 2006). Gender – a factor so predictive of ATP in prior research – once again only shapes ratings of and satisfaction of police indirectly through perceived trust and accommodation. As in the USA and PRC model, Taiwanese perceptions of officers' accommodation had more effect in predicting satisfaction with the police in general than trust, although both accommodation and trust figured more equally in this context in forging outcomes. Additionally, perceptions of safety did not have clear pathways to predicting ATP, thereby endorsing Worrel's (1999) views that feelings of safety and police efficacy are quite orthogonal from perceptions of fairness and social support.

There were other markers of commonality in the Taiwanese data and in the models derived from the USA and PRC. Interestingly, gender and safety were inexplicably missing from Figure 5.1 and, as stated above,

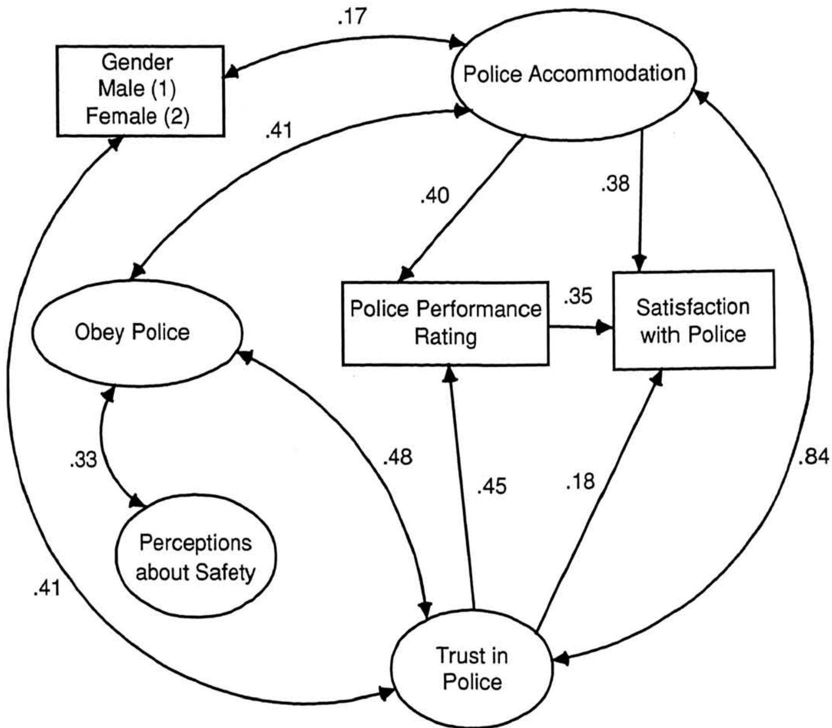


*Figure 5.2* **Attitudes to Taiwanese police**

accommodation gave way to trust which alone predicted the two ATP outcomes. Nonetheless, accommodation and trust were mutually co-determinants and both shaped respondents' expressed obligations to obey the police. Why then did the focal role of communicative accommodation remain in Taiwan, but 'subside' in the other two contexts? Our answer at this juncture relates to the nature of the questions posed respondents in the context of the size of the community targeted. It will be recalled that in the Californian research, views of law enforcement targeted *specifically* the local police agency. In Taiwan, police 'in general' would necessarily be translated as the local police force; their cognitive and affective retrieval mechanisms would locate those proximate officers on the Island. In Kansas and the PRC – both of which are many times larger in size than Taiwan – rating police 'in general' might well have invoked media and generic images beyond that of the local agency. In this sense, particular communicative behaviours might not have assumed primacy as they would have in more localized contexts.

## epilogue

Even given the PRC and Kansan data (which derived from very different social contexts, varying as they did in terms of police violence and police reform) and the different questions asked in this study vis-à-vis its predecessors, accommodation did still play an integral role in the construction of ATP. Moreover, a robust link between it and perceived trust was sustained, suggesting that CAT can be useful in understanding domains of criminal justice. As detailed by revised propositions in Giles, Willemyns et al. (in press), this study has implications for a refinement of CAT to the extent that perceived accommodation can yield increased attributions of trust and fashion a climate whereby policies promoting community policing could be more easily fostered. As Oberle (2004) has argued, '...creating a long-term positive image of law enforcement in the minds of the public rests with the support of individual officers and their ability to create a positive image on a daily basis within the communities they serve' (p.27). The results of this study, and other findings elsewhere in the USA and Africa (e.g., Hajek et al., 2006), highlight the perhaps *universal* importance of trust in police and officers' accommodation to meet these ends.

Having presented cross-cultural data which empower accommodative phenomena and processes in the law enforcement domain, we return now to our starting point: the basics as well as inherent complexities of CAT. A number of disciplines have profited from its insights, and in this chapter we have selected an array of experimentally-controlled laboratory and naturalistic studies from around the world designed to explore its dynamics. As readers have seen from recurring treatments of the opening scenario of a traffic stop, there are a plethora of communicative options for, and reactions to, people interacting (who have personal and many social identities). Drawing upon extensive observational data on police roles (Mastrofski, 1983), Roberg, Novak and Cordner (2005) allude to why this context is very relevant to us as social psychologists of language and discourse:

> Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of police work revealed by these figures is the importance of *communication* skills. Five of the six most common actions taken by officers consisted entirely of talking and listening. These five were interviewing, interrogating, lecturing or threatening, giving information, and giving reassurance. It is primarily by communicating that police officers determine what is going on... and [reach]...an amicable solution... (p.30, our italics).

We contend that CAT – with its attention to macro-contextual forces, interpersonal and intergroup dynamics, motives, and social consequences – can handle many of these (and other) intricacies. Indeed, a person's accommodative resources and flexibility may make up a hitherto unrecognized statement about his or her communicative competences (see Burleson & Greene, 2003; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977), and CAT has the potential to be associated with a very wide range of individuals' uses of communicative actions.

Relatedly, while CAT could be infinitely elaborated to take account of expectancy violations, arousal, cognitive schemas, relational development, and so forth, it was never conceived to be a theory for *all* interpersonal and intergroup eventualities. That said, as we move into new research domains such as police culture, there is the potential for exciting theoretical connections for future development. The law and society literature refers to police behaviours which parallel many forms of accommodation. For example, studying officers seeking compliance with requests for self-control (as opposed to requests for identification or other compliance requests), McCluskey (2003, p.91) found that:

> Citizens who receive respectful treatment from authorities are almost twice as likely to comply, and those receiving disrespectful treatments are nearly twice as likely to rebel. If the citizen's voice is terminated by the police they are more than twice as likely to rebel against the police request for self-control. If the police demonstrate their commitment to making an informed decision by seeking information about the presenting situation, citizens are more than twice as likely to comply with the . . . request for self-control.

Procedural justice theory and CAT are each based solidly in social psychology and acknowledge the prominence of communication in police–civilian interactions and, together, they might swing open the double doors to a better understanding of them.

Finally, let us transform some of the more obviously-relevant aspects of CAT into the police–civilian terrain and with a view to forging an implicit research agenda. As we have seen, police officers have in uncertain, anxious and dangerous situations, such as so-called routine traffic stops and beyond, the obligation and inclination to be accommodatively appealing. They understand that these situations are costly for civilians who may not appreciate that part of the enterprise for them is to be educated appropriately about a violation that may have happened. Officer accommodation – which we have seen from our data above has

positive consequences for their ingroup image in general – can reap many immediate rewards in promoting a personal and educative atmosphere where compliance is promoted and frustration and aggravation (or even worse) diminished. Yet such communicative stances can also be motivated – sometimes in parallel – by a nonaccommodative stance in the pursuance of everyone's safety. Empirical questions worthy of following through with actual videotaped data (if possible) for coding and other discursive analyses, then explode in abundance. What specific officer accommodations facilitate what ends? Do civilians (in the moment of social exchange) understand or acknowledge the perspective of the officer and his or her safety challenges? How do civilians construe and respond to actions they perceive as nonaccommodative? Is the ritualistic departure of an officer with, 'Have a nice day!' seen as divergent, or even hostile? What effects, in tandem and in cyclic fashion (as above), do civilians' accommodativeness–nonaccommodativeness have on officers' cognitions, affect, demeanour and ultimately outcome behaviours (e.g., citations, warnings, assistance)? CAT would suggest the value of accommodating. Interestingly, anecdotal experiences by the first author and his police associates suggest, in actuality, the paradoxical preponderance of public *non*accommodations.

Needless to say, theoretically-driven questions about officer–civilian encounters, let alone analogous questions *within* the hierarchical organization of police culture pertaining to office-supervisor/management interactions (see Toch, 2003), could command the foci of numerous studies. Beyond that, we contend that if the policy of community-oriented policing is to fulfil its potential in reducing crime and neighbourhood fear and enhancing subjective feelings of safety (Morash & Ford, 2003), then its mechanics deserve closer attention by social psychologists of language and discourse. Community-oriented policing works from the premise that law enforcement and civilians work in partnership with each other. Interestingly, what constitutes the philosophy and underlying ideology of so-called community-oriented policing varies even across the samples highlighted in this chapter. For instance, the process in the PRC encourages prevention of crime by locating family or clan members who are involved in it and appealing to moral education to remedy the situation. In this way, the police are supplementary to and facilitative of moral education to punish violators more informally (Wong, 2001). Yet whatever model of community-oriented policing is adopted, unhelpful, naïve and inaccurate images where they exist – from *both* sides of this intergroup context – are extremely counterproductive to developing such partnerships. In other words, the microscopy of analysing particularis-

tic discourses and documenting interactional self-reports can serve in the valued direction of helping people live their everyday lives with a minimal need to combat violence, abuse, corruption and (nowadays, technological) exploitation.

## notes

1. We are extremely grateful to Cindy Gallois for thorough and insightful feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter and to Val McLean and Carrie Ashley for their invaluable assistance.
2. For instance, and besides gender differences, we were interested in whether Americans would report feeling safer as well as perceive police in general more positively (e.g., satisfaction, trust and accommodation) than would our Asian respondents. In addition, we were interested in what differences (if any) would emerge between the USA, Taiwan and the PRC concerning amounts of contact, group identity salience and voicing concerns to police.
3. Results indicated that both American and PRC participants perceived the police to be more accommodating, and trusted them more, than did Taiwanese informants. With regard to obligation to obey the police and satisfaction with and ratings of them, a staircase USA > PRC > Taiwan pattern emerged. Americans (and not surprisingly men more than women) felt overwhelmingly much safer than respondents from either the PRC or Taiwan. Furthermore, females reported more trust in police than did males overall; however, these differences did not extend to include feelings of satisfaction, tendency to obey police, or accommodation. Findings revealed that Americans, and men more than women, had more contact with police than respondents from either the PRC or Taiwan. Additionally, participants reported low-to-moderate levels of contact with police and claimed to witness more than they personally experienced. Police-initiated contact varied staircase-wise across the locations: USA > Taiwan > PRC. The two Asian samples, as well as males in general, considered themselves and the police as belonging to two different social groups to a greater extent than did those in the USA. Finally, it was the PRC participants who felt the most comfortable voicing their concerns to the police should problems have arisen.

   Given the accommodative foci of the present chapter, the precise details of the multivariate findings will be reported elsewhere (as well as comparatively with other cultural contexts such as South Korea, Japan, Louisiana, Canada and Guam); see the first author for details.
4. As a matter of interest, the relevant means in Table 5.2 for evaluating police are rather lower than in previous work in southern California (Giles, Fortman et al., in press); officers are seen as less trustworthy and accommodating, and ratings of them correspondingly lower.
5. In an initial test of the measurement models, all the indicator variables showed relatively high path coefficients from their latent factors in each location. However, a nested models comparison indicated a lack of measurement invariance across the three models. After several measures were dropped (see Table 5.1), measurement invariance between the PRC and USA was achieved ($p = .23$), but not between these locations and Taiwan. For this reason, true

comparisons can be made between the PRC and the USA only. As stated, it appears that the Taiwan data were somewhat idiosyncratic.

6. PRC: $\chi^2 = 86.34$, $p = .001$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .057; US: $\chi^2 = 89.08$, $p = .001$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .057.
7. $\chi^2 = 117.24$, $p = .006$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .045.

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