

1 The Social Origins of CAT

Howard Giles

Any conversation you have with a Vancouverite will include at least three "awesomes" and two "perfects." If you want to really blend in, toss in the occasional "good times" and a "right on."

Nikki Baley, Vancouver Sun, H1, August 24, 2013.

The national language is Icelandic, and while you'll have no problem getting by using English, we're grateful anytime a visitor tried to use *Góðan daginn* (good day) or *Takk* (thank you).

Icelandic Stopover (flight magazine), September 2015.

One feature of human, as well as other animals' (Beecher, Campbell, Burt, Hill, & Nordby, 2000; Candiotti, Zuberbühler, & Lemasson, 2012), behavior is that much of it is synchronized (see Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). Military folk march together, people sing in choirs and love to dance with others, all the time keeping in synch with each other – and in ways that facilitate social cohesion. I have always been fascinated by such processes and especially how it is enacted in, and (as in the travel scenarios above) prescribed, for talk. In this opening chapter, I indulge the reader in how communication accommodation theory (CAT) was born, how it developed, and what follows in this volume.

The Early Days

From my formative years in Wales, I had noted, when in high school, that my distinctive Cardiff accent (see Coupland, 1990) would shift to a more South Welsh brogue when talking with other spectators at a rugby game, and then to a more Standard English with my peers at college who hailed from the south of England. I wondered, in fact, whether I was a mere "linguistic chameleon," later discovering that I was decidedly not on my own! But I also noticed tendencies towards asynchronous patterns, such as when walking into a North Welsh pub with said college mates to hear the entire gathering there switch to the Welsh language from previously talking in English as we entered.

Later, on the first day of graduate school, when one of my mentors (Henri Tajfel, the architect of social identity theory [SIT]) asked me to declare my



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"theoretical framework," I replied bemusedly that not only did I not have one, but also did not fully comprehend what he meant! I had the very strong feeling and urge thereafter to embrace or concoct one pretty quickly if I was ever going to survive in Social Psychology at the University of Bristol in England – as the development of and passion for SIT was clearly and infectiously underway. Yet, there it was staring me in the face – the accent phenomena I had personally witnessed and have just described. Ironically, over forty years later, hardly a day goes by that I am not required (sometimes on more than one occasion) to account for why I have not accommodated to American English. In addition, hardly a month goes by now when I do not thrill at discovering a unique accommodative move, such as friends talking in low whispers to my wife who had almost lost her voice for a while.

As I scoured the literature for interpretations of what subsequently became known as "accent convergence and divergence" (Giles, 1973), I did find studies on interlocutors matching temporal aspects of each other's speech rates (e.g., Matarazzo, Weitman, Saslow, & Wiens, 1963), but very little in terms of convincing explanatory mechanisms. It was at this time that I turned to Sociolinguistics – and post-doctorally self-labeled myself a "sociolinguist" as I felt a much stronger bond with that academic community than my own – and became inspired by the work of Labov (1966). He had produced a well-cited volume (and re-published forty years later) showing that as the formality of a situation increased - from conversing about a colloquial topic to reading isolated words - New Yorkers' pronunciations took on more prestigious patterns. Speech – and later communication accommodation – theory (CAT) emerged as an attempt to provide socio-psychological bite to that and related phenomena. Indeed, given that Labov orchestrated the very contexts in which language was elicited from his informants, I argued (Giles, 1973) that these seminal findings might have been due, at least in part, to his interviewees' accommodating this commanding researcher's own changes in speech style; after all, was Labov himself contextually immune?

Bristol was very kind to me and evolving renditions of CAT were patiently entertained in a series of seminars for Colin Fraser's psycholinguistic graduate seminar, my adviser, Peter (the Red Pen) Powesland and, subsequently, my very gracious external Ph.D. Examiner (1971), Peter Robinson, as well as my anonymous D.Sc. Examiners (1996). Over the decades, many "accommodation theorists" – colleagues, graduate students, and generations of *their* graduate students (e.g., Lawson-Sako & Sachdev, 1996) – joined me on this academic journey (see Acknowledgments) – including in major ways contributors to this volume as well as Justine and Nik Coupland (e.g., Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988), and my spouse (e.g., Giles & Giles, 2012).

Henri Tajfel eventually resonated to the theoretical quest I was taking, sponsored a monograph on it in his own book series (Giles & Powesland,



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1975), and contributed to it (e.g., Bourhis, Giles, Levens, & Taifel, 1979). In parallel, and given the ferment of intellectual excitement with Bristolian graduate students who became major players in their own right (e.g., Mike Hogg and Rupert Brown), with a close colleague and friend (John Turner), I also became involved in promoting the value of intergroup theory (e.g., Turner & Giles, 1981). Thereafter, not only did I fold SIT tenets into CAT (e.g., Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977), but Henri funded me with a postdoctoral fellowship where I spent a significant portion of time at McGill University with Wally Lambert and Don Taylor. Gratifyingly, the latter duo seemed to relish working on accommodative issues (Bourhis, Giles, & Lambert, 1975; Simard, Taylor, & Giles, 1976), and an early publication from my Montreal era found its way into the journal, Language in Society (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973). Dell Hymes, the editor of the day, created keywords for this article, and one was "accommodation theory." Not only did these associations provide life-long bonds with Don (two-naan) Taylor and my first graduate student, Richard (Boo) Bourhis, but Hymes had, independently, elevated our work to the status of "a theory"!

During the course of CAT's development, it has manifest itself in three journal special issues (Coupland & Giles, 1988; Giles, 1984; Giles, Gasiorek, & Soliz, 2015), featured as essays in ten encyclopedias across very different areas of communication study (e.g., Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Gallois & Giles, 2015; Giles, 2016; Giles, in press), spawned (as below) many satellite theories, and been studied across numerous languages, cultures, and applied settings. This book not only charts these cross-disciplinary developments in one coherent forum – the last book on the topic being twenty-five years ago (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) – but also points the way to even more refinements and elaborations in the decades to come.

A Conceptual Map of CAT's Development

McGlone and Giles (2011) articulated distinct phases in the development of CAT which will be somewhat modified in this section, with illustrative cites and a selection of the emergent satellite models highlighted (see also, Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005). It should be noted that these separate developments are interrelated – and work has flourished in all of them to this day. The first (circa 1969–) "foundational phase" was derived from observing people shifting (as above) their dialects – and bilinguals switching their languages – on a regular basis in particular directions and at particular rates (Giles & Smith, 1979; Gallois & Giles, 1998). In this period, the basic precursors to and outcomes arising from accent and speech convergence were conceptualized and schematized (e.g., Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995), and the role of speech



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accommodation was shown to be an integral component of the language attitudes literature (Giles & Powesland, 1975).

While other motives for accommodation had been discussed (see Street & Giles, 1982), the second, "intergroup/contextual phase" (circa 1977–) focused on *divergence* and nonaccommodation as forms of social differentiation, drawing on SIT (see Giles, 1978; Giles et al., 1977; see also, many of the chapters in Harwood and Giles, 2005 and Chapter 5). The larger-scale social conditions necessary to trigger communicative differentiations (e.g., a high group vitality) led to the development of ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles & Johnson, 1981) which, in turn, inspired the intergroup model of second language acquisition (Giles & Byrne, 1982) and, later, the acculturation, tourism, multilingualism models (Giles, Bonilla, & Speer, 2012; Giles, Ota, & Foley, 2013; Sachdev, Giles, & Pauwels, 2012).

The bilingual work had particular theoretical (and pragmatic) appeal as it construed the learning of a second language to varying degrees of native-like proficiency as being an accommodative move. Furthermore, it framed the so-called failure to learn a dominant culture's language in more positive, "healthy" terms, in that it heralded a desire not to assimilate but, rather, to tenaciously preserve a group's linguistic culture. Such a nonaccommodative stance by, say, an immigrant group (and particularly one with an increasingly perceived high vitality that maintains its own linguistic landscape) can often be seen as threatening by the host community (see Barker et al., 2001).

Ultimately, satellite models in other intergroup contexts emerged, such as language contact between: speakers of different age groups (Fox & Giles, 1993); people with different physical abilities (Fox, Giles, Orne, & Bourhis, 2000); the genders miscommunicating in the workplace (Boggs & Giles, 1999); and police–civilian interactions (Choi & Giles, 2012). In all these, theoretical attention was afforded how and why *non*accommodative language forms were fundamental to understanding when individuals define an interaction more in *intergroup* than interpersonal terms (see Dragojevic & Giles, 2014).

The third and related development can be termed a "subjectivist phase" (circa 1982–) that saw CAT embrace a quite complex propositional structure aimed at elucidating both the antecedent conditions under which accommodative/nonaccommodative acts surfaced as well as the social consequences arising from them (e.g., Giles, Willymens, Gallois, & Anderson, 2007; also Chapter 7). The prime insight here was that speakers accommodate not to where others *are* in any objectively measurable sense but, rather, to where they are *believed* (or biasedly heard) to be communicatively (Thakerar, Giles, & Cheshire, 1982).

A fourth phase (circa 1986–) moved CAT into the sphere of intergenerational communication and health (Giles, Coupland, & Wiemann, 1990;



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Farzadnia & Giles, 2015), with a focus on under- and overaccommodating moves (Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991; Harwood & Giles, 1996; see Chapter 5). Accordingly, the so-called communicative predicament of aging model emerged (Harwood, Giles, Fox, Ryan, & Williams, 1993; Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986) that has since guided much communication and aging research (Giles & Gasiorek, 2011). Amongst other findings, this body of work showed that young people tend to overaccommodate their elders by means of patronizing talk in ways that those socially and cognitively alert find demeaning. For their part, older folk were deemed to underaccommodate younger people by talking too excessively about their own problems (see Coupland et al., 1991). Not only can these accommodative mis-moves lead to intergenerational dissatisfaction and avoidance but, for older people, can contribute to the social (and communicative) constructions of aging, fermenting lowered self-worth, depleting life satisfaction, and even accelerating demise (Giles, Davis, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2013; Giles, 1999). Indeed, this work

2016). The fifth, and concurrent (circa 1988-) "communicative breadth" phase (e.g., Coupland et al., 1991; Giles & Wadleigh, 2008) saw CAT really blossom as a general theory in its moving beyond the adaptive use of accents, slangs, and languages to embracing different discourse styles and nonverbal practices (e.g., gait and dress styles; see later also, Denes, Giles, & Gasiorek, in press). Convergence and divergence were conceived of as but a *couple* of the many ways in which people accommodate or not (called "approximation strategies"). Attention now was also paid to "interpretability strategies" where communicators took into account the shared knowledge each had on the conversational topic to hand as well as their communicative needs and relative social statuses, called "discourse management" and "interpersonal control strategies," respectively (see Chapter 8). These developments led also to an acknowledgment of speakers being able to blend convergence and divergence simultaneously, albeit at different communicative levels, in order to fulfill complementary social and identity needs. In this sense, a speaker could diverge from another to maintain their status position but also simplify their grammar and avoid jargon terms, thereby taking into account the listener's presumed and, in this case, limited knowledge base.

spawned a collaborative cross-cultural program of research around the globe – especially across many South and East Asian nations as well as in Australasia, Africa, and the Middle East that has: provided support for the predicament of aging model (see McCann, Giles, & Ota, in press); moved into the intergenerational workplace (e.g., McCann & Giles, 2006); and also lead to the "communication ecology model of successful aging" (e.g., Gasiorek, Fowler, & Giles,

The last, to date, set of CAT advances suggested a "mediating mechanism phase" (circa 2006–) and coincided with my interest in police–civilian



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encounters as a result of my becoming a sworn law enforcement officer for fifteen years (Choi & Giles, 2012). The theory was then directed toward how accommodations could trigger various emotions like irritation, pride, and joy which then dictate particular evaluative and behavioral reactions from others (Dorjee, Giles, & Barker, 2011). In particular, this was the dawn of another large-scale international collaborative project (e.g., Hajek et al., 2008), including work in other such sites as Russia, Bulgaria, Armenia, and Mongolia that examined how people's views of the accommodativeness of police officers led to feelings of trust which, in turn, enhanced reports of compliance with law enforcement (e.g., Barker et al., 2008). Additionally, attention was drawn to the ways in which attributed intent influenced listener's reactions to accommodation (Gasiorek & Giles, 2012). In this way, a nonaccommodative stance does not necessarily directly trigger negative evaluations of another's attributes but, rather, can be mediated by the negative affect (e.g., frustration and anger) that it arouses (Myers, Giles, Reid, & Nabi, 2008).

Again, these six, admittedly reconstructed, CAT phases are not mutually exclusive or successively contained developments. Instead, they are interdependent, and refinements can be seen as evolving in all of them as implied in the foregoing citations. Doubtless Chapter 10 with its inclusion of biological parameters to accommodative practices and the latter's use in new communication technologies will yield additional phases.

This Volume

As stated earlier, this edited volume is the first book-length treatment of CAT for over two decades (Giles et al., 1991). Much has happened over that time as the theory has undergone a quantum leap in terms of empirical interest across cultures, languages, contexts, and media, particularly since 2000 (see Chapter 4). Indeed, so much research has emerged that an edited volume with committed and energetic colleagues who could provide synergy within and between chapters was deemed the best route to providing a comprehensive overview of extant CAT work, and with visionary perspectives for its future. Each of the chapters then provide quite *unique* analyses of, and slants on, CAT in terms of quantitative and qualitative gains, its relevance to understanding language and communication across an array of significant social categories (from ethnic minorities to people-with-disabilities), and its importance in life-and-death contexts.

The next chapter provides us with a cogent foundation for looking at CAT comparatively alongside other existing accounts of interpersonal communication adjustment. In this (Chapter 2), Jessica Gasiorek discusses an array of frameworks addressing this phenomenon, such as mimicry, language matching, grounding, and many others. Tabulating and contrasting their inherent features, she, ultimately yet conservatively, argues for some of the merits and advantages



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of CAT. This is followed by a chapter with Marko Dragojevic and Jessica Gasiorek (Chapter 3) delineating the theory's concepts and discussing relationships and mechanisms in CAT's framework. In so doing, we review empirical (mostly quantitative) work on the theory relating to motivations, perceptions, attributions, and social consequences that provides the reader with a grasp of the breadth and intricacies involved in accommodating and nonaccommodating. As evident from the foregoing, CAT has had a history of revising its integral propositions over the decades, and this chapter ends with a set of refined *Principles of Accommodation* that reflect many of its parameters in accessible, summary form. The next chapter by Jordan Soliz and Gretchen Bergquist puts CAT's quantitative work to a stringent test by reporting on an updated (see Soliz & Giles, 2014) statistical meta-analysis of accommodation studies and findings since the theory's inception (Chapter 4). Gratifyingly, and within the remits of

such an analysis, strong support is garnered for the essence of the theory and across a variety of accommodative tactics, such as reluctant accommodation.

Attention next is focused on *non*accommodative mechanisms and strategies by Jessica Gasiorek (Chapter 5). Although a lot of the CAT literature is devoted to forms of accommodative behaviors, a chapter on this topic was considered necessary for pulling together the growing body of research on it, acknowledging the ubiquity with which people do *not* accommodate each other, and the social meanings and consequences this can have. Although a fair proportion of CAT studies has been conducted with the employment of quantitative methods, a range of other methods have also been employed. With Cindy Gallois and Anne Weatherall, we provide an analysis of qualitative studies of this genre (Chapter 6). This includes some new conversation analytical data, with a further Principle of Accommodation paying due homage to the fact that accommodativeness is *talk in action*. The fact that CAT has commandeered such eclectic methodological prowess from scholars across disciplines is well broached in the chapters thus far.

Then, together with Nik Palomares, Cindy Gallois, and Jordan Soliz, we explore the intergroup nature of accommodative-nonaccommodative practices for the first time across a range of very different settings, namely, the intercultural, intergenerational, between-gender, interability, and family domains. One of the vibrant features of CAT is that it can theoretically maneuver between interpersonal and intergroup climates, and Chapter 7 is a testament to its potency in the latter domain. This chapter ends with a refined intergroup accommodation model that can meaningfully transcend, and integrate, the very different intergroup settings discussed (as well as others not highlighted therein).

Although CAT has been invoked interpretively across a wide range of applied settings, including veterinary and dental clinics and the educational practices associated with these, in this volume we feature two of the most-studied



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organizational settings where discourse and decisions arising from them can truly affect people's lives. A focus on health and medical contexts follows, with Bernadette Watson, Liz Jones, and David Hewett discussing their own and others' work on accommodative practices in these domains (Chapter 8). Clearly, effective accommodation between medical and health professionals results in better care for patients along many dimensions. Unfortunately, we find that nonaccommodative stances undertaken by different medical specialties – who all, necessarily in their different ways, treat the same patients – can stymie the (even physical) well-being of those in their care and safety. Next in Chapter 9, and together with Augusto Gnisci and Jordan Soliz, we engage CAT work in organizations more generally, but with a unique focus on police–civilian encounters and the courtroom under one (conceptual and sequential) umbrella. Negotiating between accommodative and nonaccommodative stances in these settings can, obviously, have severe consequences in terms of police-involved shootings, publically aired arrests, incarceration, and capital punishment.

The volume closes with Cindy Gallois, Jessica Gasiorek, and Jordan Soliz where we critically examine some of the assumptions underlying the Principles of Accommodation alluded to above. As importantly and in addition, this epilogue proposes various so-called vistas for a future theoretical and research agenda that appeal to among other facets: new methodological innovations; the ever-evolving fascination with neuroscience measures and processes; the new communication technology revolution; and the systematic application of CAT to interventions and training in intergroup communication.

Conclusions

The editor and contributors hope and believe that this volume captures the scope and essence of CAT and its applications to communication processes and contexts, although inevitably not all important contexts can be discussed in detail (but are necessarily included in the theoretical coverage). We believe that CAT is now positioned to continue as a key theory of communication, which uniquely combines intergroup and interpersonal, perceptual and behavioral, and contextual factors. Research exploring CAT is prolific yet integrated, and we believe that it will continue in this way into the future.

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