

Segmented Assimilation in Canadian Context

Introduction

Assimilation theories have traditionally dominated North American academic and policy orientations to the adaptation and integration of immigrants, and continue to do so (for comprehensive literature review see Alba and Nee, 1997). On the whole, these theories suggest that acculturation or cultural assimilation in any number of forms is the primary predictor of economic incorporation for immigrants, but particularly of their offspring and further descendants. However, increases in the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of immigrants in the context of strong and changing structural barriers to their integration have caused researchers originating primarily in the American context to question whether acculturation is still the dominant or most successful intergenerational strategy to economic incorporation for immigrants.

These researchers have suggested instead a process of *segmented assimilation* whereby immigrants who share strong cultural or ethnic ties tend to use them to additionally support intergenerational mobility, rather than (or in conjunction with) becoming more culturally and socially similar to the host society (Portes and Rambaut, 2001; Zhou 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993). These theories also suggest that as acculturation is segmented, so too is the culture assimilated into, such that even successful acculturation can lead to downward assimilation (into an underclass or 'oppositional culture') as well as upward (into the middleclass or beyond).

Although this theory was specifically formulated to address the structural constraints and outcomes of immigrants and their offspring in the American context, it is also beginning to be quite widely used in European research as well. Yet despite historical and structural similarities, the similarly important role of immigration to population and economy, and our unique official policy of multiculturalism, this theory has thus far seen only very limited use in the Canadian context. Given that such a high percentage of Canada's population growth continues to be immigration driven, and that discussion surrounds issues of successful economic integration, and may entail empirical justification of the way we think about ethnic affiliations under multiculturalism, there are obvious public and policy advantages to seeing segmented assimilation research done in Canada. Ultimately, the proposed study seeks to contribute to the rather anemic and ambiguous body of work that has been conducted in this direction thus far.

Theoretical Overview and Related Research

Segmented assimilation theory posits that a group's ability to act out economic incorporation/human capital mobility agendas (well articulated or unconscious) successfully are aided or constrained by structural factors, which include a social climate of racial discrimination and ethnic mistrust, a bifurcated labour market with few 'middle rungs' to step up to, and the consolidation of the poor in ethnicized inner city areas lacking in opportunities and often institutional support. These structural factors interact with group level factors such as mode of incorporation (mainstream views of that particular group, the political climate and their social status on arrival), average economic/human capital resources of individuals, and the strength and coherence of ethnic community social networks (Portes et. al., 2005; Portes and Rambaut, 2001; Zhou 1997).

American research has shown that groups who are disadvantaged in other ways are often able to economically incorporate over a generation through concretized organizations and informal ethnic social networks that both facilitate and encourage normative parental and

community control of children and youth, and that harbor a strong normative orientation specifically to higher education. The idea is that those groups that are able to maintain these relations in the face of obstacles may have an advantage over those who choose not to, or are less able to maintain these ties, even those who also have a strong orientation to higher education themselves, in that they are less able to transmit those values and expectations to children (Zhou and Kim, 2006).

Since the beginnings of its formulation in the late 80s and early 90s (see for example Gans, 1992; Portes and Zhou, 1993), segmented assimilation research in the U.S. has made use primarily of statistical analyses of national survey data to indicate the differential socioeconomic/human capital outcomes of various ethnic groups and then more qualitative comparative case study methods to articulate the social mechanisms by which selective acculturation occurs (for comprehensive examples see Zhou and Kim, 2006; Portes et al., 2005). The methods needed to articulate these processes are at least part of the reason why research has been lacking in the Canadian context.

The main difficulties in using segmented assimilation theory in Canada include:

- 1) Evidence from national surveys has been ambiguous to unsupportive of the theory.
- 2) There have been very few comparative case studies, where evidence would be most clear.
- 3) Evidence supportive of segmented assimilation have all been of a kind, essentially validating only one aspect of the theory.

As these problems may be seen to relate to data availability, there are several reasons for believing that despite these problems, segmented assimilation may still be an important theory for understanding the economic incorporation of the second generation in Canada, as it is becoming in other developed nations beyond the U.S.

The greatest difficulty with unsupportive or ambiguous national survey results has been limited data on the second generation that is sufficiently differentiated by ethnicity and educational attainment, and socioeconomic/human capital status of parents (see for example Boyd, 2002; Boyd and Greico, 1998). Researchers note for example that the educational outcomes for the children of immigrants by visible minority status are equal to or greater than those of non-visible minority Canadians, but that this may hide substantial variation by specific ethnic group (data that has not readily been available), or that insufficiently detailed outcome indicators (education/income) and important controls (age, generational status, parental socioeconomic status, family status) may hide the same sort of variation. Moreover, small sample sizes of many groups, and the overall recency of visible minority second generations have inhibited comparisons with the more traditional European based children of immigrants.

The relative lack of the more holistic comparative case study methods (with the notable exception of Fong and Ooka, 2006) endemic to the American use of the theory is also problematic, as these methods really infiltrate the mechanisms of social networks that add both to social cohesion and social and parental control over the orientations and life paths of the second generation, which have been shown to lead to higher mobility goals and higher educational and occupational outcomes in American research (see for example Zhou and Kim, 2006; Portes et al., 2005). This is also the type of research that can best articulate the interaction of various levels of the acculturation/incorporation process.

Studies that have conscientiously used and found support for segmented assimilation in Canada have tended to be of the 'spatial distribution' variety. These point to the existence of racial or ethnic segregation along income and neighborhood lines, showing that for example racial status of some immigrant groups is a predictor of living in a poor

neighborhood, but not others (Fong and Shibuya, 2003), or that living in neighborhoods with a high proportion of coethnics is related to high ethnic group income levels or home ownership levels for some groups, and low for others (Haan, 2007). While these studies support the idea of a relationship between structural and group factors that differentially constrain immigrants in the acculturation/economic incorporation process, they do so only indirectly. They have thus far been unable to differentiate between generations and have only limited indicators of outcomes, such that they suffer the same basic problems of the less supportive literature – a lack of evidence stemming from a lack of sufficiently detailed data.

Statistical Modeling

This paper uses the first panel of the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey to explore whether there is evidence of segmented processes at work among particular ethnic groups in Canada using a series of ordinal logistic regressions to the model upward mobility of the second generation. The idea is to measure for an ethnic effect on the education outcomes of the second generation, then to create measures of potential group level effects (social capital as formalized through community forces and ethnic social structures) and add them to the models. To get a handle on the variables involved, a single statistical method (ordinal logistic regression) will be applied to several sets of models.

Logistic regression does not hypothesize linear effects, require a continuous variable as the outcome, or work best with continuous control variables (as does multiple linear regression), rather it predicts the probability of a case falling into particular categories of the outcome variable based on its placement in categories of the controls, largely by treating categories of the controls as dummies. Thus it tends to be a useful model when measuring phenomena that fall into a small number of categories, (such as schooling by highest degree), which may or may not be of constant or measurable category size, or where there are no hierarchal structure of values to the categories Ordinal logistic regression specifically will be used so as to retain the importance of the ordering of the categories.

While the model course listed below is lengthy, there is no expectation that all runs will be fruitful or worthy of discussion in the final analysis. Further, those detailed here represent best case scenarios. In the interests of efficiency, validity and parsimony, model structures and specific variables may change through the course of the study.

Model 1: The population of interest overall is the second generation, aged 15-35, and they are the total population in model 1. The main outcome variable in set 1.1 is education and in set 1.2 it is income, with education as one of the controls. Education may be thought of as the incorporation strategy employed. Income controlling for education is a measure of the success of using education as an economic incorporation strategy and indirectly helps to assess the existence of the structural constraints to incorporation which is posited to contribute to (though not fully account for) high level educational strategizing in the first place. As a special case with an indirect link (and feedback repercussions), income will probably not be continued as an outcome in the model series.

As mentioned above, differential educational success of the second generation can be measured two ways:

1. As outperforming their parents to a greater or lesser degree (upward mobility).
2. As obtaining some absolute level(s) of education (the idea that upward mobility requires fairly absolute amounts of higher education).

I have chosen to measure absolute levels of education for the second generation as the outcome variable for all models, and to control for parental education in model 1.1 because

theory suggests that in a bifurcated labour market, the highest level of education possible is what immigrants strategize for their offspring.

The independent variable of interest is of course, the ethnic group, since it is particularly the 'ethnic effect' we are looking for in educational outcomes. The controls in model 1 are age, sex, education of parents, SES status before age 15, family status at age 15, and currently in school.

Model 2: This model is actually several separate ones, with the populations of each being the second generation of particular ethnic groups (as yet unchosen, but distinguished by a combination of having large enough populations for statistical analysis, and significant effects after controlling for other variables in model 1). In set 2.1, other controls remain as before to create a set of control models. In set 2.2 individual indicators of ethnic social capital are added to attempt to account for the ethnic effect.

Models 3 and 4: These models aim to better distinguish social socioeconomic environment and social capital proper by using group level controls rather than individual ones in models that otherwise mimic models 1.1, 2.1 and 2.2. Group level indicators summarize the income, education, and proportion of two-parent homes at age 15, through assigning mean (or possibly median) substitution to control measures within ethnic groups along with individual controls for age, sex and currently in school. These models should also give some added evidence of an ethnic effect, which may be important if the results of model 1 are ambiguous.

Models 5 and 6: Here social capital factors are added to models 1.1 and 3.1 to give a broad, but potentially more complete picture of ethnic effects in the educational outcomes of the second generation.

Optimal results on these models include finding that ethnic group is related to differences in educational outcomes (after controlling for other variables), and that these differences can be related to ethnic social capital in a way that explains more than individual or group controls alone. Speaking generally, these models cover the broad differences between and within ethnic groups on variables standing for all of the concepts important to segmented assimilation. It should provide indications of whether or not this process is at work, and whether it fits more with the results of American vs. European research. It should also hint at some reasonable next steps in research.

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