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Cultural Proximity and Audience Behavior: The Role of Language in Patterns of Polarization and Multicultural Fluency

Thomas B. Ksiazek and James G. Webster

Cultural proximity is a multidimensional concept, most often used to explain media preferences across national boundaries. The present study extends the construct, revealing its power to explain audience formation within a multicultural society. Portable People Meter data from Arbitron, Inc., was used to compare patterns of television and radio use across Spanish-speaking Hispanics, English-speaking Hispanics, and non-Hispanics in Houston, Texas. The results indicate that language preferences play a powerful role in determining audience behavior. Furthermore, while English-speaking Hispanics exhibit multicultural fluency, the other two populations show evidence of cultural polarization.

Cultural proximity is the intuitively appealing notion that people will gravitate toward media from their own culture. In a world where diverse populations have access to increasingly abundant media environments, it has emerged as an important theoretical construct for explaining audience behavior. Despite its appeal, though, it remains a loosely defined concept that consists of many more discrete factors, most notably language. Further, research on cultural proximity typically stops short of a clear demonstration of its impact on actual patterns of media consumption.

This study addressed both concerns by analyzing radio and television usage among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Specifically, it used Portable People Meter data provided by Arbitron to assess language as a determinant of audience behavior among Hispanic Americans in Houston, Texas. Unlike previous research, this allowed for an examination of patterns of audience loyalty both within and across radio and television outlets.

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Cultural Proximity

Straubhaar explained cultural proximity as "... the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture" (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 85). The concept has been used primarily in international contexts to explain the drawing power of foreign and domestic media. Scholars typically credit De Sola Pool (1977) with the original idea and Straubhaar (e.g., 1991, 2003) with elaborations of the construct.

It grew in response to notions of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1969) and economic theories (e.g., Waterman, 2005; Wildman & Siwek, 1988) that predicted one-way flows of culture from richer to poorer countries based on superior production quality. The latter economic explanations often credit the superior quality to a "home market advantage" (Waterman, 2005), whereby traditional production centers such as the United States can justify large production budgets based on the prospect of large domestic revenues, irrespective of foreign markets. Any additional revenue recouped abroad is merely a bonus. However, as regional production centers, such as Mexico, Brazil, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Bollywood, Dubai, and South Africa continue to grow and increasingly compete with the traditional centers of media production, these notions of imperialism seem outdated.

The emergence of regional media production is consistent with notions of cultural proximity. In order for content to best resonate with the cultural dispositions of viewers, the content and the viewer must exist in the same "cultural linguistic" (Straubhaar, 2003) or "geolinguistic" (Cunningham, Jacka, & Sinclair, 1998; Straubhaar, 2003) space. According to Straubhaar (2003) examples include: Spanish (Latin America), Chinese (East and Southeast Asia), Arabic (Middle East), German (Europe), Hindi and Tamil (South Asia), and Malay (Southeast Asia). The claim is that a Chilean audience member, for example, would prefer content produced in Mexico to content produced in the United States.

Proponents of cultural proximity highlight the importance of language in determining audience preferences for different media products. De Sola Pool argued, "people would rather see a film made in their own idiom than one with subtitles or even one that is dubbed" (1977, p. 143). Similarly, Straubhaar maintained, "At the individual audience level, competence, ability to speak or at least understand the language of a broadcast, is an important ingredient in audiences' selection of a program and their enjoyment of it" (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 82).

But language is not the only determinant of cultural proximity. Theoretically, cultural proximity has been tied to the broader concept of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984). Straubhaar conducted a qualitative case study in Brazil, during which he performed 228 in-depth interviews over a 10-year period. He found evidence of cultural proximity resulting from varying levels of cultural capital among different social classes (Straubhaar, 2003). His research suggests that a great many more discrete variables may be at play in determining cultural proximity. La Pastina and Straubhaar claim, "there are other levels of similarity or proximity, based in cultural elements per se: dress, ethnic types, gestures, body language, definitions of humor, ideas about story pacing, music traditions, religious elements, etc." (La

Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005, p. 274). In addition to these factors, authors sometimes include: gender images, lifestyle, knowledge about other lifestyles, values, education, family, personal and group networks, travel, religion, and organizational affiliations (Straubhaar, 2001, 2003). Furthermore, genre proximity can influence audience preferences (Obregon, as cited in Straubhaar, 2007). For example, scholars have argued that familiarity with the genre of melodrama has allowed for the success of *telenovelas* worldwide (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 2007). Clearly, cultural proximity is a complex notion with a great many dimensions. As a result, scholars have described cultural proximity as existing on multiple levels, corresponding to multiple layers of an audience member's identity. These include geographic, cultural, religious, and ethnic, just to name a few (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 2007). Moreover, most of these factors are confounded with language, so their exact role in producing proximity effects is often difficult to sort out. All, however, predict that given access to culturally diverse media materials, people will prefer, *and in turn choose*, media that are more proximate.

Empirical tests of the cultural proximity hypothesis have made extensive use of television program schedules. Straubhaar and colleagues examined prime-time television programming over a 40-year span on the assumption that it offered "a reasonably accurate indication of what is most popular with the audience" (Straubhaar, Fuentes, Giraud, & Campbell, 2002, p. 11). They found that a "new kind of cultural proximity" (p. 23), comprised of international trade patterns, migration, and geography, leads to an affinity for not just local or national, but also regional media products.

Longitudinal studies specific to individual countries have produced similar results. Over time, foreign media have become less popular, and accounted for a smaller portion of program schedules relative to domestic media. In Argentina, 49% of the total programming in 1983 originated outside of the country, while only 22% did so in 1996 (Chmielewski Falkenheim, 2000). Davis (2003) studied *Ecuavisa*, an Ecuadorian television outlet, finding that viewers chose to watch Ecuadorian, Latin American, and American programming, in that order. The author analyzed total programming hours and ratings. Interestingly, although *Ecuavisa* imported more programming than it produced, its audience chose the domestically produced content. Both of these studies suggest cultural proximity at work, yet neither accounts for the specific factors that explain it.

Though most often documented in Latin American or Hispanic media studies, the impact of cultural proximity is evident in European contexts as well. Much like the studies above, Buonanno (2001) analyzed the program schedules of five major European countries and found that while television fiction of domestic origin comprised anywhere from 19–47% of total programming, it accounted for the majority of prime-time programming. Similarly, Trepte (2003) found that although the majority of fiction programming in five European countries originated in the United States, the top-rated series in each country were almost all produced domestically. Trepte attributed this to cultural proximity but did not explicitly address the role of language preferences.

The tale of cultural proximity, then, is usually told as the triumph of domestically produced media over the alien foreign media privileged in models of cultural imperialism and one-way flows. Other scholars have documented the related phenomenon of "contra flow" which involves a smaller nation exporting media content back to the nations that are typically associated with the international exportation of media, such as the United States (Cunningham et al., 1998, p. 189). This too is often celebrated as promoting a more culturally diverse media environment.

A darker prospect, that the contra-flow of media from the growing number of regional production centers might polarize culturally diverse populations *within* a given country into different audience groups who rely on entirely different media outlets for their news and entertainment, is scarcely considered. While in some quarters, such behavior might be viewed innocently enough as rational consumers simply exercising their media preferences, it would doubtless give others cause for alarm. Several social commentators have worried that the abundance of new media environments will erode the public sphere by breaking it into many enclaves or "sphericules" that never interact with one another (e.g., Gitlin, 1998; Katz, 1996; Sunstein, 2001). The prospect that cultural proximity might drive cultural polarization deserves more attention.

Unfortunately, studies of cultural proximity that document the phenomenon by examining programming practices and/or the prime-time ratings of individual programs have serious limitations. While it may be the case that program schedules tell something about program popularity, they reflect a number of other factors as well. These might include the cost of acquiring programs or scheduling policies that give domestic programs preferential treatment. Even audience ratings do not necessarily illustrate audience preferences for culturally proximate materials, since nondomestic programs may be tired reruns scheduled at less desirable times or on less desirable channels. At best, such evidence of cultural proximity should be regarded as circumstantial. Further, none of the studies reported above affirmatively measured the language preferences of audience members, even though that is arguably the most important component of proximity. Nor has previous research examined the relative appeal of media broadcast in different languages across linguistically defined subsets of the population. As a result, the role of language in explaining patterns of media consumption is less visible than one might wish.

Audience Behavior

Understanding the role that cultural proximity plays in audience formation requires that it be among a broader array of factors that determine audience behavior. Webster and Phalen (1997) have offered such a framework. In a nutshell, they have argued that media choices were jointly determined by macro-level factors like audience availability and the structure of the media environment, and micro-level factors like individual needs and preferences. In the current context, the authors view cultural proximity as a dimension of individual media preference.

To reveal how proximity affects actual patterns of audience behavior, then, one must first try to mitigate the influence of macro-level factors. Ideally, behaviors should be studied in a setting where media materials in different languages are abundant and readily available to audiences at all times of the day. Broadcast media would seem ideally suited to this purpose. Further, since audience availability circumscribes individual program choices—and hence program ratings—considering audience behavior over broad dayparts would afford the clearest look at the influence of cultural proximity.

The literature on cultural proximity places language preferences at the center of the construct. All things being equal, people will opt for media in the language with which they are most comfortable. Language, however, is only one dimension of proximity, and cultural proximity (as the term is usually defined), is only one dimension of media preference. Other micro-level audience traits may have an equally powerful effect on preference. Age, for example, is correlated with preferences for news versus entertainment, as well as other genres of television and music. Analyses of media choice need, at the very least, to be cognizant of these factors as alternative explanations for whatever behaviors are observed.

Broadly speaking, there are two measures of audience behavior routinely assessed by analysts: gross and cumulative (Webster, Phalen, & Lichty, 2006). Gross measures, like ratings and shares, offer a snapshot of audience size. Cumulative measures, like reach and frequency, track audience members over time. The latter form of measurement helps in identifying patterns of audience loyalty. A specific mode of cumulative analysis, called audience duplication, has been used to study patterns of repeat viewing, channel loyalty, and audience flow (e.g., Goodhardt, Ehrenberg & Collins, 1987; Webster, 2006). As Cooper (1996) noted, "In its simplest form, audience duplication is the percentage of viewers who watch program 'X' who also watch program 'Y' regardless of different channels or days" (p. 96). That technique can also be applied across different types of media. The current study features both gross and cumulative measures of audience size and an analysis of audience duplication.

Studies of audience behavior have, to date, offered only limited insights into the effects of cultural proximity. Some years ago, Barwise & Ehrenberg (1984) reported that religious and "minority language" (i.e., Spanish) television stations in the United States had small, but unusually loyal audiences as measured by time spent viewing. Similarly, Webster (1986), using a secondary analysis of diary data, reported that viewers of a Spanish-language TV station spent a disproportionate amount of time tuned to that broadcast. At the time these studies were conducted, Spanish-language outlets were limited in number and not particularly well financed. In a more robust media environment, the power of cultural proximity might be expected to operate across various media. Unfortunately, there is virtually no research that documents such patterns of loyalty across channels within a medium, or across different media (e.g., television and radio). The current study addresses that gap in the literature.

Hispanic-American Audiences

As noted above, the most forceful claims about the effects of cultural proximity, as well as most empirical tests, have dealt with the appeal of American programming in Latin American contexts. The rapid growth of Hispanic populations in the United States, however, presents an interesting opportunity to further test notions of cultural proximity. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, over the past 35 years the Hispanic-American population has grown from 9.6 million in 1970 to 41.9 million in 2005, with growth rates exceeding 20% in the last 5 years (Hakimzadeh & Richard, 2006; Suro & Passel, 2003). As this has happened, Spanish-language media outlets in the United States have proliferated. Three full-time Spanish-language television networks now exist and, in cities with large Hispanic populations, many local broadcast stations offer Spanish programming. In those markets, multiple Spanish- and English-language outlets stand side-by-side, equally accessible to culturally diverse populations.

Houston, Texas, is such a place. It is the fourth largest Hispanic market in the United States (Nielsen Media Research, 2006). The Houston "Designated Market Area" (DMA^{®1}) includes the city of Houston, as well as the surrounding suburbs. The majority of the population is non-Hispanic and, overwhelmingly, speaks English. Over one-third of Houston's population, however, is of Hispanic descent. Many are Mexicans who speak primarily Spanish. Many more identify themselves as Hispanic, but use English as their primary language. These three subsets of the Houston population offer a naturally occurring, if imperfect, manipulation of cultural proximity. Specifically, this study assumes that non-Hispanics and Spanish-speaking populations will have a powerful affinity for media in their own language. English-speaking Hispanics, however, would seem to occupy a liminal space. In all probability, they will have a greater affinity for the cultural conventions of Spanish programming than non-Hispanics. In other words, even if English is their first language, Spanish television and radio will be more proximate to them. They are also far more likely to be functionally bilingual. Comparing media use across these three audience groups, then, offers a glimpse of cultural proximity in action.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The foregoing review of literature suggests a number of research questions and hypotheses. The most obvious is that the language preferences of audience members have a powerful effect on the media outlets they use. The first objective, then, was to use the availability of Arbitron's Portable People Meter data to assess what television and radio outlets were most popular among the three culturally defined audience groups described above. This leads to the first research question:

RQ₁: To what extent do groups with different language preferences attend to media outlets using their preferred language?

While language is the most salient, and probably the most powerful, component of cultural proximity, it is doubtful that language preferences alone explain audience affinities for media outlets. The current analysis of audience groups in Houston, which are defined by both their language and ethnicity, suggests the possibility of more nuanced proximity effects. Previous work in public opinion research has shown that English-speaking Hispanics occupy a point equidistant between non-Hispanics and Spanish-speaking Hispanics, with the latter two groups at opposite ends of the continuum (e.g., Hill & Moreno, 2001). Thus, it would make sense to predict that non-Hispanics (NH) and Spanish-speaking Hispanics (SH) would also choose very different media outlets. That is, what is popular with one group will be unpopular with the other. English-speaking Hispanics (EH), however, are likely to occupy a less rigidly defined cultural space than the other groups. This leads to these two hypotheses:

- H₁: The most popular media outlets among NH and SH will be inversely related.
- H₂: The media outlets chosen by EH will be positively related to both NH and SH.

Simple gross measures of the popularity of individual outlets, however, do not reveal patterns of audience loyalty across time. The literature certainly suggests that cultural proximity would be an important determinant of such cumulative behavior. That is, groups with strong language preferences should move across media outlets favoring those in their preferred language. Specifically, if two outlets are in the same language, there should be relatively high levels of audience duplication. Once again, though, one would expect EH to be less driven by language. This leads to two further hypotheses:

- H₃: Similarity in language across media outlets should be positively related to audience duplication among NH and SH.
- H₄: Similarity in language across media outlets should be unrelated to audience duplication among EH.

Method

This study relies on a secondary analysis of Portable People Meter (PPM) data collected by Arbitron, Inc. in the Houston market. The PPM "... is a mobile-phone-sized device that consumers wear throughout the day that works by detecting identification codes that can be embedded in the audio portion of any transmission" (Arbitron, Inc., 2006, para. 4). PPM technology, recently accredited by the Media

Rating Council, has been adopted in several countries and is being rolled out as state-of-the-art measurement in larger U.S. markets. In the Houston test market, all 16 local broadcast television stations, 44 radio stations, and more than 40 cable television networks embedded identification codes in their signals, affording a very precise measure of exposure across those media.

The PPM data were based on a probability sample of the population, aged 6 and older, in the Houston Designated Market Area. It is the tenth largest overall DMA[®] (Arbitron, Inc., 2007) and the fourth largest Hispanic DMA[®] in the United States (Nielsen Media Research, 2006). In addition to collecting measures of media exposure and standard demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, etc.), Arbitron asked respondents to report their ethnicity and primary language spoken in the home. For the latter, the participants were coded as "Spanish-primary" or "English-primary." These variables were used to construct the audience groupings of non-Hispanics (NH), Spanish-speaking Hispanics (SH), and English-speaking Hispanics (EH) that were featured in the analysis.

Various external factors always dictate audience behavior, at least to some degree. Something as trivial as the need to walk one's dog or run errands undoubtedly factors into whether that person is or is not counted as an audience member during that time period, regardless of whether they otherwise would have been. To mitigate the problem of audience availability, the authors chose to avoid daypart analysis and examine the use of broadcast outlets and major cable networks between 5 a.m. and 12 a.m. across an entire week. Further, to limit the influence of very young respondents, the analysis was confined to adults 18 years and older. In order for a panel member to be included in the survey, he or she must wear the PPM device for at least 8 hours a day, for a minimum of 6 out of the 7 days of the sample week. There were 947 individuals in the PPM sample so defined; 12% were EH and 15% were SH. Additionally, the sample was composed of equal parts male and female. The authors chose the week of August 4–10, 2005, a standard sample week that began on Thursday and ended the following Wednesday. That week was selected on the assumption that it would reveal relatively normal patterns of media use. First, no major American or Hispanic holidays occurred during the week. Second, issues of the *Houston Chronicle* published during the week reported no major or atypical events that would have distorted media use. Finally, the authors compared the findings with broad multimedia rankings from a second week in March 2006 and found no meaningful differences.

The authors used the PPM Analysis Tool, a software program supplied by Arbitron, Inc., to create estimates of TV and radio use for all three audience segments. Overall attendance was based on a measure of each outlet's "average daily cume rating." That is, the percentage of the audience in each group that tuned to a given outlet for at least 5 consecutive minutes in a quarter hour of an average day. The PPM Analysis Tool was also used to produce estimates of the total size of the duplicated audience across selected radio and television outlets within each audience group. The duplicated audience across those outlet pairs was then used as input for a correlation analysis testing the effects of similarity in language across the outlets in question.

Results

The results are presented in two sections. The first compares the overall popularity of media outlets by reporting gross and cumulative measures of audience size. The similarities and differences across each audience address the research question and the first two hypotheses. The second section examines patterns of audience duplication and addresses the final two hypotheses.

Audience Size

Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the relative popularity of television and radio outlets, respectively. To have reasonable sample sizes associated with the use of each outlet, this analysis was limited to the top 25 outlets in each medium. Each table ranks media outlets by their overall weekly cumulative audience. It then reports the rank and cumulative rating of that outlet across the three audience groups of interest. For example, the most popular TV outlet overall was the ABC affiliate, KTRK-TV. It was also the most popular station among EH and NH. However, it was only the 14th ranked station among SH, with a cumulative rating of 8. Conversely, the most popular TV station among SH was the Univision affiliate, KXLN-TV. It was viewed by 80% of the SH population in the course of a week, as compared with a mere 1% of the NH population. A similar pattern existed for listenership to radio stations. The most popular station among EH and NH was an English-language adult contemporary station, KODA-FM, while SH favored a Spanish-language station, KLTN-FM.

While these tables suggest the intuitively appealing result that audiences will favor media outlets in their preferred language, the pattern is not inviolable. For example, the WB and Cartoon networks were viewed by 14% and 13% of SH, respectively. Indeed, an alternative explanation for at least some of the results might be that Hispanic populations were younger than NH audiences. In fact, just under half of the Hispanic population was aged 18–34, while only one-quarter of NH fell in that age range. To assess confounding effects of age on media choice, the authors replicated the analyses in Tables 1 and 2 using people who were aged 25–54. Even controlling for age, though, no meaningful differences in the popularity of outlets were found.

Casual inspection of Tables 1 and 2 suggests that SH are very different from NH in their use of television and radio. To provide a more precise assessment of that observation, and test H_1 and H_2 , the rankings of all 50 media outlets were correlated across each audience subset. Table 3 reports the results. As predicted in H_1 , the popularity of media outlets among NH and SH was inversely related ($r = -0.35$, $p < .05$). Generally, what was popular among NH was unpopular among SH, and vice versa. Conversely, media outlets popular with EH are strongly correlated with SH ($r = 0.651$, $p < .0001$), and positively related to NH ($r = 0.123$), though that relationship fell short of statistical significance. The EH population looked more like

Table 1
Relative TV Outlet Popularity Across the Three Audiences

All	Network	Outlet	English-Hispanic (EH)		Spanish-Hispanic (SH)		Non-Hispanic (NH)	
			Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)	Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)	Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)
1	KTRK-TV	ABC	1	39	14	8	1	42
2	KHOU-TV	CBS	3	32	13	8	2	41
3	KPRC-TV	NBC	5	26	20	3	3	31
4	KRIV-TV	FOX	2	33	9	12	4	26
5	KHWB-TV	WB	6	25	6	14	5	22
6	KTXH-TV	UPN	7	22	10	11	6	18
7	KXLN-TV	Univision	4	27	1	80	49	1
8	Nickelodeon		8	19	11	9	9	11
9	USA		14	11	24	3	7	13
10	KFTH-TV	TeleFutura	9	18	2	52	50	1
11	TNT		18	9	20	3	8	12
12	Cartoon Network		12	11	7	13	14	9
13	KUHT-TV	PBS	23	8	12	9	11	10
14	MTV		12	11	15	6	13	9
15	TBS		17	10	16	3	12	10
16	Spike TV		14	11	17	3	15	9
17	Fox News Channel		38	4	46	0	10	10
18	A&E		16	9	39	1	16	8
19	Fox Sports Net SW		26	7	18	3	17	8
20	ESPN		20	8	23	3	18	7
21	KTMD-TV	Telemundo	10	15	4	28	54	0
22	KZJL-TV	Indep. (Spanish)	11	13	3	29	51	1
23	Sci-Fi Channel		21	8	20	3	20	7
24	Food Network		28	6	36	1	19	7
25	Lifetime		30	6	32	1	21	7

Note: The outlets and all of their components were properly encoding their signal for at least 95% of the days in this survey period. The #5 outlet for the Spanish-Hispanic audience (Galavisión) was not included because it ranks #32 for the English-Hispanic audience and #37 for the entire Houston DMA.

Table 2
Relative Radio Outlet Popularity Across the Three Audiences

All	Network	Outlet	English-Hispanic (EH)		Spanish-Hispanic (SH)		Non-Hispanic (NH)	
			Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)	Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)	Rank	Avg Cume Rating (%)
1	KODA-FM	Adult Contemporary	1	18	8	7	1	13
2	KRBE-FM	Pop Contemporary Hit Radio	2	17	11	6	6	9
3	KHMX-FM	Hot Adult Contemporary	6	12	14	3	2	10
4	KTBZ-FM	Alternative	4	13	12	3	3	9
5	KILT-FM	Country	14	5	19	2	5	9
6	KTRH-AM	News Talk Information	12	5	27	0	4	9
7	KLTN-FM	Spanish Regional	3	14	1	33	28	0
8	KPTY-FM	Rhythmic Contemporary Hit Radio	7	12	7	8	8	6
9	KKRW-FM	Classic Rock	10	6	16	2	7	8
10	KLOL-FM	Hispanic/Urban CHR	4	13	2	22	19	1
11	KHJZ-FM	New AC (NAC)/Smooth Jazz	11	6	17	2	9	5
12	KIOL-FM	Album-oriented Rock	13	5	23	0	10	5
13	KTJM-FM	Mexican Regional	15	5	3	22	37	0
14	KSBJ-FM	Contemporary Christian	9	6	15	2	13	4
15	KOVE-FM	Spanish Contemporary	8	8	5	16	27	1
16	KUHF-FM	News Talk Information	30	1	21	1	11	5
17	KQBU-FM	Regional Mexican	18	3	4	18	21	1
18	KPRC-AM	News Talk Information	21	2	34	0	12	5
19	KQQK-FM	Spanish Pop	17	3	6	9	34	0
20	KHCB-FM	Religious	19	2	30	0	15	2
21	KTSU-FM	Jazz	27	1	23	0	14	2
22	KLAT-AM	Spanish News/Talk	22	1	9	7	29	0
23	KEYH-AM	Spanish Oldies	20	2	10	6	32	0
24	KILT-AM	All Sports	24	1	34	0	26	1
25	KSEV-AM	News Talk Information	31	0	27	0	16	1

Note: The outlets and all of their components were properly encoding their signal for at least 95% of the days in this survey period.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix of Outlet Rankings Across the Three Audiences

	EH	SH	NH
English-Hispanic	—	0.651**	0.123
Spanish-Hispanic		—	-0.350*
Non-Hispanic			—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .0001$ (two-tailed).

the SH than NH in this comparison, though there was still a positive relationship between EH and NH, thus supporting H_2 and suggesting that the former occupies a kind of middle ground in this test of cultural proximity.

Audience Duplication

The gross measures of audience size reported above reveal nothing about audience loyalties across time, while the cumulative ratings only scratch the surface. It seems likely that the vast majority of SH not only watch Univision, but also spend much of the rest of their time with Spanish-language media. To investigate such underlying loyalties, the authors studied audience duplication across both television and radio media outlets. The value of this duplication analysis lies in its ability to reveal patterns across both space (TV and radio) and time. Since sample sizes become smaller when one imposes the joint condition that respondents must have used both outlets "X" and "Y," the selection of outlets studied was limited to the top four TV stations, and the top four radio stations in each Hispanic audience group. As there was some overlap in the top-ranked stations across groups, a total of 13 outlets were identified for further analysis. That produced 78 possible outlet pairings.

Table 4 shows a small portion of all the possible pairings, and is offered to give readers a sense of the duplication data. Specifically it reports the percent of those in each group who watched ABC, the top-rated TV station among NH and EH, and also used the remaining 12 outlets during the week. For example, it indicates that among NH who watched the ABC affiliate, 71% also watched FOX, 87% watched CBS, but only 5% watched Univision. Similarly, Table 4 reports the extent to which those who viewed Univision, the top-rated TV station among SH, also used the other outlets. For instance, among SH who watched Univision, 65% also listened to KLTN-FM, the top-rated Spanish-language radio station in the market.

This descriptive snippet of the duplication data suggests that NH spent very little time with Spanish-language programming. SH, while relatively loyal to Spanish-language programming, spent at least some time with English-language outlets. EH, on the other hand, seem much more likely to move across linguistic boundaries

Table 4
Audience Duplication Across Selected Radio and TV Outlets

Outlet	Network/Format	ABC			Univision		
		EH	SH	NH	EH	SH	NH
TV							
KTRK	ABC	—	—	—	60	29	91
KRIV	FOX	74	43	71	76	36	67
KHOU	CBS	85	60	87	67	29	66
KXLN	Univision	48	100	5	—	—	—
KFTH	TeleFutura	40	85	4	70	87	13
KZJL	Independent (Spanish)	30	61	3	42	66	5
KTMD	Telemundo	36	85	2	62	70	9
Radio							
KODA-FM	Adult Contemporary	51	24	45	52	27	61
KRBE-FM	Pop Contemporary Hit Radio	46	27	26	43	24	56
KLTN-FM	Spanish Regional	32	46	3	60	65	6
KLOL-FM	Hispanic/Urban CHR	24	50	4	43	60	23
KTJM-FM	Mexican Regional	23	36	0	23	51	0
KQBU-FM	Mexican Regional	8	31	1	17	37	0

Note: Read down and to the left. Each measure of duplication answers the following question: Of the viewers of the above outlet (ABC or Univision), what % also watches or listens to the outlet to the left?

than the other groups, thus complicating the picture that emerged in the results on audience size.

To provide a more comprehensive and precise assessment of the effect of language on audience duplication, and to test H_3 and H_4 , the authors identified each of the 78 possible pairings as of the same language (coded 1) or of different languages (coded 0), and then determined whether this dummy variable correlated with the absolute size of the duplicated audience. That analysis was performed for each audience group. The correlation between language and duplication was highly significant for SH ($r = 0.512, p < .001$) and NH ($r = 0.295, p < .01$), thus confirming H_3 . However, similarity of language showed a very small, although still positive relationship to audience duplication among EH ($r = 0.099, p > .05$). This last result offers partial confirmation for H_4 . That is, while the relationship is slightly positive, it is of a very low magnitude, even approaching a nonexistent association. Although this suggests that language does factor into the media consumption habits of EH, to a small degree, it explains a great deal less for this segment than the two others.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm and extend the literature on cultural proximity. Language appeared to be a powerful component of the construct, and explained a good deal about audience formation across media. When given the choice, English speakers overwhelmingly consumed English-language media and Spanish speakers consumed Spanish-language media. Those affinities were evident not only in gross measures of how many people used a particular media outlet over the course of a week, but also in how they moved from one outlet to the next. Such intuitively appealing, if unsurprising, findings go well beyond the usual analyses of TV program schedules and prime-time ratings to empirically demonstrate the power of proximity in media choice.

But the results also suggest subtler and more complicated dimensions to cultural proximity. On the surface level of gross rankings, language seems to explain most of the choices for non-Hispanics and Spanish-speaking Hispanics. Meanwhile, English-speaking Hispanics seemed to occupy a middle ground between non-Hispanics and Spanish speakers in their overall use of radio and television outlets. By examining patterns of audience duplication over time, it became even clearer that they are unlike either population. They moved easily between media outlets in each language. In fact, similarity of language explained only a very small amount of the variance in audience duplication among this subset of the audience. This suggests that these members of the audience had a kind of *multicultural fluency* that made them at home with programming of either sort.

Such thinking is broadly consistent with what students of cultural proximity have to say about cultural capital. Many discrete factors constitute cultural capital, including education and a host of life experiences that cultivate broad and discriminating tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). The more cultural capital people possess, the more freedom they can exhibit in patterns of consumption (e.g., Holt, 1998). Proponents of cultural proximity typically agree that language is an important component of cultural capital. Thus, it logically follows that the more languages one speaks, the more license one has to choose diverse media.

For the purposes of this study, the non-Hispanic and Spanish-speaking audiences were essentially monolingual, based on how each respondent self-identified. This led to media preferences determined, in the first instance, by language. As a result, these audiences experienced what might be thought of as a kind of *cultural polarization*, where the ability to speak only one language limited their cultural consumption options. In a more generalized setting, accounting for the American television-viewing population as a whole, Webster (2005) found only modest evidence of audience polarization. However, when that audience is defined along ethnic and linguistic lines, as it is here, polarization becomes more apparent. Viewed in this light, the tale of triumph, typically associated with notions of cultural proximity, becomes a cautionary tale.

The power of such cultural proximity coupled with economic prosperity has led to the growth of regional media production centers throughout the world. For

example, Brazil and Mexico serve Latin America; Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea serve East Asia; Bollywood serves South Asia; Egypt and Dubai serve the Middle East; and South Africa serves the African continent. A question raised in the present study is whether these production centers might also promote cultural polarization in multicultural societies. Populations in large Western nations are becoming evermore diverse. At the same time, their media systems are serving up more varied programming. Currently, the average U.S. household receives 104.2 TV channels, a figure that is up nearly 70% since 2000 (Nielsen Media Research, 2007). Many of these new channels offer content from distant regional production centers around the world. Satellite television subscribers have access to international programming packages, and depending on the service provider an individual can access up to 135 foreign channels in over 25 different languages (EchoStar Satellite L.L.C., 2007). If the Hispanic audiences already have an affinity for Spanish-language broadcast networks, what will happen when the number of Spanish cable and satellite networks increases? Will other linguistically defined audiences gravitate toward the native-language programming increasingly available on cable, satellite, or the Internet? Cultural polarization predicts that the contra-flow of programming back into the traditional media production centers will result in ethnically diverse audiences retreating into linguistically defined enclaves of media consumption.

Growing levels of cultural polarization might, however, be mitigated if members of multicultural societies will become increasingly adept at moving across content from different cultures. This speaks to the aforementioned notion of multilayered identities and multiple levels of proximity. In the Houston market, there is some evidence of that. The cultural identities of English-speaking Hispanics, defined here by both ethnicity and language, allow them to move freely between both English- and Spanish-language media outlets. It is plausible that they were, at least to some degree, bilingual and had an appreciation for the cultural conventions that characterize different sources of programming. They seemed at home in a more liminal space where their increased cultural capital diversified their media consumption choices.

These findings are consistent with previous research on bilingual Hispanic Americans. In 2002, the Pew Hispanic Center conducted a survey of 4,213 Hispanic Americans over the age of 18 (Suro, Brodie, Steffenson, Valdez, & Levin, 2002). The results found bilingual Hispanics slightly more likely to obtain news in English, but that they generally preferred English and Spanish equally (Suro, Brodie, Steffenson, Valdez, & Levin, 2004). The present study goes beyond news consumption and finds that English-speaking Hispanic Americans prefer a wide range of media in both English and Spanish.

While some might view these liminal populations as lost or in search of their cultural identity, a more optimistic view suggests that they are best thought of as having multicultural fluency. The ability to speak different languages helps them to move between and comprehend different cultures, sampling the best that each has to offer. Sociologists sometimes characterize such people as "cultural omnivores," whose behavior is positively correlated with other markers of cultural capital (e.g.,

Holt, 1998; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992). One can only hope that as more diverse materials become available people become more, rather than less, omnivorous.

This study, then, both supports and complicates previous work on cultural proximity. Language was, indeed, a powerful predictor of audience formation. However, that was only true for monolingual audiences. Populations proficient in multiple languages showed less evidence of linguistic effects in viewing and listening behaviors, which bespeaks a degree of multicultural fluency. Future research should refine the concept and implications of cultural proximity by seeing it not only as a contest between indigenous and foreign media, but also as a determinant of media consumption within multicultural populations. This will give a better sense of how increasingly diverse societies are likely to evolve in a world endowed with increasingly abundant media systems. To do that, more precise measures of linguistic proficiency will be needed within populations, as well as subtler assessments of the other dimensions of proximity.

The present study was limited by a lack of scaled, individual-level data on linguistic proficiency. Access to this type of data would afford one the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and media preferences. Although subjects may self-identify Spanish as their primary language, in a multicultural society such as the United States they are likely to speak at least some English. In fact, previous research has found that later generations of Hispanic Americans are much more likely to be bilingual (Suro et al., 2002, 2004). Generational differences, along with the existence of children in the household, may factor into the relationship. These variables, in addition to the aforementioned genre proximity, could potentially explain the popularity of WB and the Cartoon Network, both aimed at younger generations. It is plausible that the PPM device of a 45-year-old Spanish-speaking Hispanic mother could register her as a viewer of the Cartoon Network because she was in the same room as her 6-year-old son, who may just happen to understand enough English and be familiar enough with the cartoon genre to enjoy watching that network. Future research would be well served by access to individual-level data on media consumption and linguistic proficiency, in conjunction with other potentially mitigating factors such as generational, household, and other demographic data. Additionally, this study has shown that future research must control for language to some extent in order to grasp the subtleties of cultural proximity. The ultimate result will be a more comprehensive understanding of what drives both multicultural fluency and cultural polarization.

The importance of analyzing consumption across multiple media cannot be understated. Access to PPM data afforded the opportunity to look at the consumption of both TV and radio for the same sample audience, whether they were at home, work, or anywhere else that they might come into contact with media content. Additionally, the ability to analyze the duplicated audience across both media not only provided a more complete picture of their media consumption habits, but also revealed important differences among the three audience segments. As portable audience measurement (e.g., PPM, Project Apollo, IMMI) continues to gain traction

within industry circles, academics should follow suit. These technologies have the potential to offer new insights, as well as challenge previously accepted norms of audience behavior.

In conclusion, the present study found that language offered a powerful explanation for the media choices of Spanish-speaking Hispanics and English-speaking non-Hispanics, but was far less important for English-speaking Hispanics. Such behavior suggests that English-Speaking Hispanics have a multicultural fluency, giving them entrée to media from different cultures. Conversely, monolingual audiences seem to have a more limited range of media they perceive as culturally proximate and in turn choose. This raises the possibility that, in culturally diverse media environments, some segments of the audience will be inclined toward cultural polarization. As regional media production centers continue to develop and export their products back to traditional production centers, these prospects will become increasingly important in the study of media consumption habits in multicultural societies.

Note

¹DMA[®] (Designated Market Area) is a registered trademark of Nielsen Media Research, Inc.

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